VIGO

A FORGOTTEN BUILDER OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

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BRUNO ROSELLI

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By **BRUNO ROSELLI**

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THIS BOOK IS CONFIDENTLY DEDICATED
TO THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN *ENTENTE CORDIALE* OF TOMORROW
RESTING MORE ON MUTUAL APPRECIATION
LESS ON MUTUAL EXPLOITATION

960600

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Foreword

THIS unassuming biography of one of the most original characters in all American history—and one of the most elusive as well—is the love-child of equally fond parents named Glorious Adventure and Patient Research. Far from acquiring the sad look of a bloodhound fatally on the scent of his quarry which is so typical of biographers to whom the order has been issued, "Get Your Man", I have had an inordinately good time writing it. Soldier, banker, spy, patriot, diplomat, Merchant Prince, Vigo simply caught my fancy to such an extent, from the moment I came unexpectedly across his grave in Old Vincennes many years ago, that I found no peace till I had investigated at least the main contours of this *terra incognita.* Then I had to tell others. Hence this book.

That a man who actually re-shaped the destiny of the United States, by appearing as the *deus ex machina* in the thrilling days of the Anglo-American struggle for control of the Wilderness that is now the Middle West, with Italian adaptability playing contemporaneously

two or three leading, decisive rôles; that such a man, I say, hailed as savior by his most illustrious contemporaries, should not only have been allowed to die forgotten and in want, but should to this day have escaped the eagle eye of American biographers endeavoring to discover a new candidate for immortality, may be incredible, but it is true. Need I add, as a corollary, that the book is bound to appear to many readers as not only imperfect, but also incomplete? Plenty of Vigo material will emerge from dusty attics after this study of mine has properly focused attention upon the subject. It took one hundred years and a dozen biographies to supply us with the right description of the character and achievements of George Rogers Clark, Vigo's friend and co-worker; it will take even more time and willing laborers to show us the full figure of Colonel Francis Vigo, as he was far more ubiquitous and much more secretive. Meanwhile, this study is a starting point. I take pleasure in introducing my hero, lately exhumed from the oblivion in which he had been almost totally buried for about one century.

I have no delusions: in a few years, all sorts and conditions of men will take me to task for assuming the right of introducing Vigo. While

today only a few thousand Americans could answer with anything approaching accuracy the question, "Who was Vigo?", when this book has spread its message through homes and clubs and colleges and public libraries a number of persons will say to themselves, as they start reading this preface: "The author talks as if nobody else had ever heard of Vigo. We all know about him." Yes, but how much did they know about him *before* the present biographer started, in 1927, writing and lecturing on the subject? A similar experience I underwent some ten years ago, that time apropos of Leptis Magna, a buried city in Libia. Nobody had heard of it then except a few Africanists, nobody had been there except a few soldiers. I went, I saw, and I was conquered. It was truly beautiful. I "put it on the map", photographed it, studied it from the most non-archæological angles, lectured on it from Coast to Coast for some two years, filled illustrated magazines with pictures of it. I did not write a book on my find that time—only a few pamphlets—because somebody else was supposed to do it; I am still waiting. (Literary men's promises: worse than sailors' vows!) However, my mission was otherwise accomplished, as I have explained; now, almost

every Mediterranean Winter Cruise takes tourists to Leptis, Libian stamps proclaim the beauty of its Roman columns, the visitors' register boasts ten thousand signatures, a replica of its Basilica housed Italy's Pavilion at the recent Colonial Exposition in Paris, the Italian Tobacco Regie has named after that archæological site a brand of cigarettes. "*Your* Leptis Magna! We all know it." Yes; but not one in a thousand among these followers who delude themselves into thinking that they are leaders, knew it ten years ago, when they stared blankly at the very mention of the name—although now they honestly believe that they always did. The same will happen to Francis Vigo. Some persons seem fated to lay foundations; and when the proud skyscraper lifts its challenging height towards the sun, who thinks of its foundations?

But let us return from the Barbary Coast to the Wabash, and from Archæology to Biography. Was Colonel Vigo truly a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of Makers of America, inexplicably overlooked today against the consensus of contemporary opinion in that Midwest which echoed the statement of its first Governor, "Mr. Vigo is in truth the most distinguished person I have almost ever

seen"? The present state of documentary evidence encourages me to suggest that Vigo's career, now outlined for the first time as a whole from his arrival in the New World to his death at Vincennes three-score years later, is even more significant than was realized in his day, since Colonel Clark and Father Gibault, his two "fellow-builders of the Northwest Territory", have later been revealed, one, as a man of weak character who was soon wrecked by debauches, the other, as a canny pseudo-patriot whom I must regretfully describe as a liar, a traitor, and a cheat, fully deserving the ecclesiastical disciplinary measures to which he was subjected, and totally *un*deserving of those "public thanks of Virginia" of which he, instead of Vigo, was made the recipient.

And yet I am not nearly as interested in Vigo's *greatness* as I am in his *uniqueness*. As a psychological problem "per se", and as a problem of Italian malleability in meeting strictly American pioneer-day conditions, he is bound to remain forever delightfully baffling, irrespective of the quantity or quality of original documents which may later come to light. Think of a master mind which could pull every wire in the wild heart of the Continent, with Red or White Man,

but was so innocent of wire-pulling in Washington that he could not even put through the most valid of claims when his whole future depended on it! Think of a child of over-populated and non-colonizing Italy, who became so thoroughly part and parcel of the American wilderness that the best Indian specialists in the service of the United States Government turned to him in despair when they had reached an *impasse,* saying in the words of the most experienced among them, Major Doughty: "Vigo's influence is greater amongst the Indians than any man I know of"! Let later biographers do their worst —which is pretty bad nowadays—with my hero: they may challenge or even destroy the fibre of his character, but they will never fully fathom the venturesome depths of a soul who, in the name of America, knew how to "be all things to all people", from the most exalted to the openly questionable.

One corollary from Vigo's life can already be drawn beyond all fear of later confutation, and that is the immense debt of gratitude which the United States owes to him. Vigo would gladly have gone to the Devil in order to help his unfirm new Country; and this biographer respectfully suggests that he probably did. And

what motive urged him to such unselfish actions, except a veritable thirst of self-effacement in the name of his one great love, the United States of America? Talk about the trio "Clark-Gibault-Vigo"! After all, Clark was a Virginian officer, and thoughts of his military career as well as of his own native Country's future would most naturally urge him on to daring deeds. And Gibault was a French-Canadian priest, who, even if he did side against England in her struggle with the Colonies (and how vehemently did he deny doing it, in his confidential letter to his Bishop!) would have acted like a normal French-Canadian of his day—and perhaps not only of his day. Both had something local, something racial at stake. But how about Vigo, the immigrant from Piedmont? His patriotism sprang from a deeper vein; it was that kind of Americanism of the mind and heart which no native American can ever understand, and which present-day conditions in a United States too closely resembling Europe have made well-nigh impossible to achieve by the immigrants of our times. Today it is perhaps easier to become passionately Canadianized than intimately Americanized.

Vigo's attachment to the United States was

so all-sweeping—so "proverbial", President Harrison defined it in the course of a magnificent tribute—that I would experience almost the physical consciousness of giving real pain to my hero on this day, if I were to stress the ghastly ingratitude with which his lady-love repaid one who loved her so faithfully and so well. I only dare touch upon that note by combining with such a disagreeable statement of fact a strong indictment against my own kith and kin, the Americans of Italian birth or descent, who have allowed Vigo to be forgotten when they should have named after him every Society of theirs, every business enterprise, every brand of food, every theatre or hotel requiring some kind of a name—Vigo's having also the rare advantage of an easy pronunciation by tongues unaccustomed to the Italian language. In the name of both indicted parties I suggest but one extenuating circumstance: conditions of time and place, and in fact all conceivable kinds of conditions, have hitherto uncannily militated against the exhumation and vindication of Vigo's name and fame. Bearing that in mind, I might plead the case as follows:

"Never has America been so slow to reward and so reluctant to recognize any of her makers

as she was in the case of this unassuming foreigner whose perfervid activities and substantial purse made possible an expedition which practically annexed the Middle West to the Union. And never have the Italians of America more inexcusably failed to grasp an opportunity to show the Country of their adoption that if the German-Americans have their Steuben, the Polish-Americans their Pulaski, and the French-Americans their Lafayette, they—the Italian-Americans—have in Francesco Vigo, born at Mondoví, Italy, on December 3rd, 1747, and laid to rest in his beloved Indiana on March 22nd, 1836, a national hero no less useful to America than Steuben, no less picturesque than Pulaski, and most decidedly no less unselfish than the great Lafayette, who fought *France's cause in America* at least as much as he fought *for America.* Yet on the other hand, never has blind Fate contributed so much to conceal and obliterate every tangible evidence of the activities of a great man, as in the case of Colonel Vigo. His existence, as far as written records are concerned, was so elusive as to discourage every historian or research student desirous of gathering specific 'original source' data; Professor Bliss of Louisville, a contemporary who

had spent the better part of his life assembling first-hand material on the subject and was about to print it in 1845, was killed in a 'rencounter' before publication, and his material and notes were either scattered or most indifferently dealt with; Ottawa has yielded full lists of 'Indian Trade Licenses' for every year from 1770 to 1790, *except for 1784,* the one year when Vigo visited Canada presumably arranging for a consignment of 'Indian Trade' merchandise; not one line in Vigo's own handwriting is known to exist, side by side with formal dictated documents merely signed by him (this giving rise to the not fully convincing theory of his total illiteracy), although intelligence about him crossed the Country all the way from New Orleans where he arrived as a soldier, to Detroit where he went as a fur merchant, to Baltimore where he was used as the Bishop's diplomatic courier, to Williamsburg where he appeared as the savior of the desperate hope of Patrick Henry, to St. Louis where he rose to be the intimate friend and confidential partner of Governor de Leyba, and finally to Kaskaskia, pioneer-day 'Paris of the West', which, in order the better to refuse to yield any evidence of Vigo's decisive rôle in the celebrated campaign of Colonel

George Rogers Clark against the British forces, sank thirty-four years ago under the waters of the Mississippi—the Great American River whose northernmost sources were discovered by the Italian Beltrami, whose course witnessed the military glory of the Italian Tonti, whose acquisition by the United States was made possible by the Italian Vigo, and at whose mouth sits a 'Creole' city of Latin traditions where the Italians outnumber all other Latins three-to-one, own practically all the *Vieux Carré,* and by their resourcefulness and endurance bid fair to be the last line of defense of Latin culture in a city where Frenchman and Spaniard gave up the fight against the all-pervading Yankee one generation ago."

It is obvious that under such conditions, Vigo material is bound to be both indirect and limited. My search for it (which, hampered as I was in my travels by a serious illness, appears to me now as far from conclusive) spread over fifteen states, by no means all geographically connected with Colonel Vigo's manifold activities. The *habitat* of original material in America is distressing to a European. To study the life of a man from Portland, Maine, one must travel to Portland, Oregon, simply because some rich

and public-spirited Oregonian purchased by mistake or through spite an accumulation of manuscripts pertaining to the other Portland, and presented it to his city. Portland, Maine, will probably never be given a chance to acquire it, although it would be infinitely more useful there! Still, the photostat trade prospers under such conditions, so let us say no more about it, lest we be accused of aiding and abetting the present Depression. In Europe, peace treaties usually transfer a land from allegiance to allegiance *together with all archives appertaining thereunto,* so that one can study most local history "in loco".

The usual prefatory thanks are herewith extended to two dear friends, Italian pride of race and a strictly American sense of fair play toward a hero unjustly overlooked by Fame; they both supported me valiantly whenever I faltered in my search for Vigo material, discouraged by the paucity of letters, by the elusiveness of really significant documents. By "Italian pride of race" I mean something totally different from "Italian patriotism". No Italian could have been more exclusively, almost unreasonably attached to his new Country than was Colonel Vigo, even when she treated him in an

abominable manner; none could, alas, have forgotten more thoroughly his native Land than he did, although he was the King of the Forest Primæval while Italy was undergoing the many vicissitudes of her Napoleonic Era—and it is unthinkable that even in that backyard of civilization some echoes of her ordeals should have failed to reach Vigo, and elicited from him some expression of sympathy, some statement of his position, which would have been recorded somewhere. Yet in all his virtues and vices, in all his traits and characteristics he was so completely one of my countrymen, that it gave me joy unconfined, in the course of my research, to guess what his attitude as a son of Italy might be in a certain contingency, only to find it later confirmed by documents. And this study, incidentally, of a passionate American patriot who never relinquished the Italian *modus operandi* of his mind, stressed my low opinion of those well-meaning "Americanization" workers who are vainly endeavoring to change not only the allegiance, but the *Kultur* of the immigrant, making him a poor imitation of a "Mayflower" descendant: you can teach an honest soul to revere, you cannot teach it to ape. Of such misfits the criminality of many "second-generation

Americans" is made; for mis-Americanization has wrought far more havoc than slow Americanization. Indeed, if we dare rise on a higher moral plane, above all conflicting nationalisms, we must face this question:—What else could God have ordained but an honest interpermeating of world cultures, welded together by one strong American political authority, when He so manifestly appointed, side by side with overcrowded or insecure lands, this huge and protected Continent for an experiment on man's ability to test and discard or preserve, test and discard or preserve *ad infinitum,* not necessarily whomever, but whatever came to it from the corners of the earth? That America's earlier settlers should object to this view of her mission is only natural; but they are respectfully referred to the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. The United States has been made by just such men as Colonel Vigo, who relinquished their political flags and maintained their national traits, putting every one of these painstakingly at the service of their new Country.

It is on the subject of style—should I say "conversational" versus "historical" style?—that I shall have to supply fullest prefatory explanations. Eminent French examples have been

before my mind constantly as I wrote, for I believe that the Frenchman, never losing track of *form* for the mere fact that he is following *matter,* produces the best biography in the long run. In America the average serious biographer, writing wholly for academic sanctums and hating the very sight of the *"profanum vulgus",* starts working upon a standard skeleton which is no more individual than the automobile chassis of a certain Michigan corporation, minimizes the psychological element while magnifying the factual, and enmeshes the whole adventure of a great man's life-work in a maze of distracting footnotes and pompous bibliographies. As if the modern American library could not supply eager readers with full bibliographies on any but the most elusive original sources, and in no time! As if the writer who is deft with his pen and nimble with his mind could not find a way of incorporating any footnote material that is truly essential into the body of his work! But these pachiderms of sluggish scholarliness, most of whom still hold sway on this and that American Campus, damning every non-conformist with the title of "unscholarly"; these deep and narrow minds so adept in criticism and so inadequate in creation; these high

priests of an intellectual religion which makes no more converts and only holds the bulk of its parishioners through force of inertia—how much longer will they continue, as Cicero said of Catiline, to take undue advantage of our long-suffering forbearance? Do they fail to see the writing on the wall? Can they not descry from their ivory towers the ever-growing number of their countrymen who are turning with a sense of relief to foreign biographers, and read their readable prose with glee—or do they see it and conclude, with the mentality of yesterday's America, that all glee being sinful, these wicked foreigners are leading their Country to Everlasting Perdition?

Yet a logical Latin mind and a long American experience suggest to me at once the cause of the defensive attitude of those earnest, if unimaginative, scholars: all around the honest biographers there sprang in America during the last century—more or less—a weedy undergrowth of dishonest scribblers who prostituted history in order to sell "copy" to a population extremely undiscriminating and extremely patriotic, which wanted to worship its heroes with a furore of adoration smacking of "revival" methods. Pseudo-historical novels poisoned the

atmosphere; and young generations of Irish-Americans, Polish-Americans, and Italian-Americans were anchored more firmly to their new Land by blood-and-thunder descriptions of splendid, flawless Americans who expelled wicked alien intruders from their own United States: the Unwashed Spaniard, the Liberty-Hating Briton, the Unreasonable Indian who resented turning over his lands to sundry experiments in Democracy—one of which would even be graciously named after an Indian Chief, Tammany. After all, those bigoted scholars whom I rudely jolted before, were gentlemen, and they could not rub elbows with the writers of such slip-shod or dishonest piffle. They withdrew to the Mount Ararat of their fastidious footnotes and boresomely becoming bibliographies, and proudly shot the Parthian's arrow at the scribblers of chauvinistic "Youth literature" and at the authors of facile books like "Alice of Old Vincennes", "The Crossing", and "The Romance of Forgotten Men", in the form of the celebrated motto: *Veni et Cape.* They are still there! But the situation is not hopeless: I know one of those followers of St. Simeon Stylites whose two children are, one, a

jungle photographer for a Hollywood concern, the other, a conductor of a Marimba band.

Neither from those embittered die-hards, nor from the *genus* of their utterly iconoclastic children, I expect for this biography the measure of support that will make conclusive the fight I have undertaken, *unguibus et rostris,* to place at last this shamefully mistreated, exploited, and conveniently forgotten Maker of America upon the lofty pedestal where Fame should have landed him long ago. Such support must come from an increasingly large number of intelligent, sophisticated, although not necessarily academic Americans, patriotic in the up-to-date meaning of the word—that is, eager to make their Country right, rather than ready to announce beforehand that they will stand by her anyway, right or wrong; it will come from an appreciable quantity of Italians, both in Italy and here, who will feel a kind of family pride seeing how one of their race, humble in station of life and totally unprepared by schooling to shoulder manifold international responsibilities, wrote one more brilliant chapter in the story of Italy's gifts to humanity through the intrepidity and resourcefulness of her wandering sons; last, and surely not least, it is bound to come

from persons of all bloods, of all races, of all beliefs, of all mental equipments, who have enough imagination to visualize the one thing to which no biographer fundamentally attached to patiently gathered facts can possibly do justice in the course of his historical narrative: the psychological riddle represented by the personality of this rude son of the Italian Alps, who, pushed by events too complex for his understanding upon Mississippi shores torn by conflicting allegiances, outdoes all natives in becoming the ideal man of the time and place: the Indians believe only in him, the Americans entrust their most delicate tasks only to him, the Spanish rely for their trade on him, the French-Canadians' heart can be touched by him as by no one else, the British in the Mississippi Valley are undone primarily through his silent but relentless exertions.

That this extraordinary character should have arrived, already a grown and admirably balanced man, into the Mississippi Valley in the year 1775, and should have been able to work there incessantly for half a century—just the half-century which saw the making and the consolidation of the American empire on the shores of the Father of Waters—would seem super-

natural unless we adhere to either one of the two human explanations advanced by historians in similar cases: either that great events will make a great man, or that a great man will make events great. I am perfectly willing to admit that Mississippi River events at that time would have been great even without Vigo, but I hold that no one other man in that half century *lived* those events—I mean shaped them, prepared them, guided them—as did Colonel Francis Vigo. And when others, whether warriors, merchants, administrators, or what not, moved along and away, finding fatter pastures in Spanish or French Louisiana, settling in the Capital in the full glamour of Presidential glory, fighting bloodier battles elsewhere as far away as Mexico, or rusticating broodingly in some forgotten Kentucky town, Vigo stayed on the field of his labors even while the field disintegrated under his eyes. The last pagans believed (and the Italian poet Carducci echoed their belief in immortal song) that when the triumph of Christ's faith sent its followers chanting through the pregnant fields weird hymns on the wickedness of Nature, the Dryads silently reentered their beloved trees, never to issue forth again, following their benign protectors to that

dignified disintegration which is the happy lot of the vegetable kingdom, when its hour has come. Something similar happened here. River transportation, Indian trade, and frontiers of political empire had made all those Mississippi, Wabash, and Western Ohio towns: once the Indians crushed, the various brands of "Europeans" gone, and the Iron Horse replacing the old *Batteaux* and *Galliats,* what would there be left of New Madrid, Cahokia, Kaskaskia, even once metropolitan Vincennes? Vigo saw it, but his life had been too intimate a part of that dying world, for him to desert it now. The feeble voice of the nonagenarian muttering once more, "Everybody has forgotten me", he died there, on the old Wabash.

But another voice of his is still audible, and will probably be for centuries to come: the bronze voice of the bell tolling every day from the Court House of that County in Indiana which his humble fellow-townsmen insisted should be named after their *genius loci* "Vigo County"—a bell which Francis Vigo affectionately bequeathed to his people, as the most lasting of mementoes of a great love which did not stoop to count the steps in a Calvary of patriotic sacrifice.

CHAPTER I

Midwest: Keystone of the Union

FRANCESCO VIGO, or, if the reader prefers it, Colonel Francis Vigo, was one of the very greatest among the *real* Makers of the United States, even though he was cheated by Fame, and, in a sense, is being re-discovered only now.

His greatness is due as much to his intrinsic spiritual stature as to the basic rôle played by his time and *habitat* in the Americanization of the Continent. Yet, a strange inferiority complex—not uncommon among Italians abroad—which made him happiest when he could watch unnoticed from a top-story window epoch-making events actually brought about by him; and the suddenness with which an Anglo-American civilization clamped down, petulantly and intolerantly as usual, the merciless coils of its denationalizing, stereotyping, robotizing machine upon that un-strenuous Franco-Indian world in which Francis Vigo revolved, wiping it out of existence in no time, explain why the

memory of this front-rank benefactor of the United States has been all but obliterated by Time.

What did Vigo do, where did he live?

He may have impersonated a number of diverse rôles in the course of a life very long and never stagnant, but he represents and epitomizes one distinct period, one well-defined phase in the history of America: the opening of the Midwest. Let us temporarily waive consideration of the little Italian town where Vigo was born, and make sure that we fully understand the vast American region which gave him "a new birth of freedom".

His was the Midwest of the buffalo and of the "passenger pigeon", of French-Canadian settlements precariously ensconced in the shadow of a fort whose few defenders were decimated by malaria and smallpox; of Indians not yet to be indiscriminately hated, debauched, and hunted, but respectfully and understandingly studied in the complexity of their tribal interrelations, in the time-honored punctiliousness of their *cérémonial.* The Midwest farmer of today has no right to call our hero his spiritual ancestor: he is really Vigo's executioner. The amazingly adaptable pioneer who could

speak every one of the languages of the Red or White folk dwelling from all the way down in New Orleans to all the way up in Detroit, would have no language in common with the son of the Hoosier corn-husker who discusses the passing of dividends on Abitibi Preferred, nor with the granddaughter of the Illinois settler who wears out on Hollywood magazines a pair of ex-honest eyes deepened by mascara, watered by murine, and topped by two penciled crescents.

Vigo's Midwest is gone, sunk without trace: not so recently as to enable us to reconstruct it in detail, as was the case with the West; not so gradually as to allow scholars to go back to the source by transitory stages, as happened in the East. And with Vigo's Midwest went, apparently, everything pertaining to Vigo, not only spiritually, but, strangely enough, even in the realm of a more tangible world. Hence the great silence, the "heavy" silence—the silence of the Forest Primæval—around his once feared and revered name.

The life of Francesco Vigo is, therefore, one which would lend itself admirably to the writing of a novel, but also one which confronts a biographer with an astounding amount of technical difficulties.

The more obvious of them is of a geographical nature, and, with its economic implications, appears discouragingly impressive to the prospective biographer: the archives, both governmental and private, of Spain, England, Italy, Cuba, Canada, and the United States would have to be systematically searched for original material (much of it of a confidential nature and therefore not generally accessible) before a full record of the activities of this reticent and cautious individual—who never wrote a letter and only occasionally scrawled the signature *VIGO* at the foot of non-committal messages—could be spread before the eyes of a group of historians politically so unbiased as to give posterity a definite message upon this man's merits.

But there are difficulties less obvious and even more real in the path of Vigo's biographers. Like a wild animal forever searching for uncharted lands, Vigo had an uncanny way of appearing just wherever history, whether political or mercantile, was in an indefinite status, in a condition of suspended animation. What I said in the preface concerning Vigo's personal elusiveness, applies even more forcibly to the great events forming a background for his ac-

tions. Who owned *de facto,* in the 1780's, that Mississippi Valley which had been nominally made "Virginian" by George Rogers Clark? Scholars are still discussing it; and that was the period of Vigo's greatest international activity. Who can supply us with a decent amount of details on the formation of the great coalitions of Detroit Fur Merchants at the end of the eighteenth century? We do not even know when and how the Miami Fur Company merged into the Great Northwest Fur Company; and Vigo was what would now be called "Chief Resident Partner" for the former. "The fate of the great body of records which must have been accumulated by the company is an historical mystery", wrote W. E. Stevens apropos of that celebrated merger. Vigo was sure to get into that historical hiatus!

However, the biographer has one "point of reference" by which to steer his course: for almost sixty years, Francis Vigo was hardly ever away from his beloved Midwest, although he very seldom camped in the same spot thereof for two consecutive nights. Administrators, soldiers, traders were continuously being recalled, or moving away of their own accord, from that Mississippi Valley forever in the making: Vigo

was not going to be lured elsewhere. One short trip to Washington would have settled the problem of his old age; he preferred to go and spend a month or two in the thick of the forest, among his good friends the Pottawatomies and Shawnees. Our starting point should therefore be the "Northwest", at the time when this term applied to the territory lying between the western edge of Virginia, and the White Man's settlements along the Mississippi.

Happily, among all later contributions to the history of the United States, the most significant, involving a wholesale readjustment of comparative values, have dealt with the westward urge of the "Midwest Frontier". It is but natural that it should be so, and the rest of the Country need not feel cheated. How long was the monopoly secured in America's textbooks by Puritans and Cavaliers, followed by the glamor of California's "Covered Wagons"! Now, Daniel Boone and George Rogers Clark have finally emerged from comparative obscurity into such glorious light, that I tremble lest some minor eastern hero like Paul Revere and Barbara Fritchie should resent the popularity of these uncouth interlopers. What a tragedy, for elocutionists at least, if Paul Revere should be-

come so angry as to start racing toward wherever he came from, with the all-sweeping resolve of Columbia River salmon determined to spawn most becomingly! The Atlantic Seaboard patriot often reminds me of those World War officers at the front who always managed to have at their side the pick of newspaper correspondents when an advance took place. With prejudice vanishing toward the overabused "Middle West", and actual knowledge growing on the exploits of these Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois frontiersmen (rougher characters to be sure, less surrounded by diary-writing, polished gentlemen of the leisure class, and often illiterate, as may have been the case with my hero), the epic of the woodlands between Kentucky and Saint Louis in the second half of the eighteenth century is bound to occupy an ever-increasing proportion of the general history of the United States, if for no worthier reason then because the archives of the four countries which struggled there for supremacy—France, England, Spain, and the United States—still hold vast hoards of source material on that field; and the increasing ability of the American scholar to find his way through such archives, together with the eventual realization

that a civilization rushing toward its future but forgetting its past can be neither truly great nor long lasting, point to the fact that the history of the Midwest between, let us say, the founding of permanent White settlements at Kaskaskia and Vincennes, and the Chicago Fire, will grow in comparative importance with the years.

It is hard to see which of the long list of heroes of the early Midwest, from the Chevalier de la Salle down, was essentially the greatest. But I do not see how it can be questioned that the most useful of them to the United States was Colonel George Rogers Clark, because through his epoch-making Western campaign in 1778-79 not only were the States of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota added to the Union, but the feasibility appeared for the first time of ultimately pushing the young Country all the way to the Pacific Ocean: an imperial project of colossal daring even when viewed from the wooded banks of the Mississippi, but certainly one which no sane American could have advocated while precariously perched upon the steep cliffs overlooking the Ohio. Yet from the Mississippi River, in what were essentially two leaps—one dispossessing France, and the other Mexico—

the United States became transcontinental, thus radically changing the entire history of the modern world. Let me stress the fact that were it not for the capture of Vincennes in 1779 by Colonel Clark, who thus eliminated England's last stronghold from the political map of the Mississippi Valley and appealed tremendously to the imagination of all "rebels", the United States would never have dared demand of England (through Benjamin Franklin at Paris in 1783) the cession of the entire territory now divided into those five states, and incidentally populated today by some twenty-five million inhabitants; demand it in the name of the *uti possidetis* principle, that is, because of actual possession by the United States of such puny White settlements as there were—mainly Kaskaskia, "Paris of the West", with her 300 "Parisians" (!), Cahokia, a much less pretentious affair, and "metropolitan" Vincennes which boasted, shortly before the time of Clark's conquest, as many as 232 Whites, with 10 Negroes and 17 civilized Indians in their service or employ. What of the smallness of the settlements, numbering around one thousand souls all told, including transient *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois?* In the dispute between the

United States and England, it was a case of one thousand to nothing; and England had to yield, trusting to her economic supremacy for a later *revanche* which never came. Had she retained the Midwest, where would America be today? With the heart of the Continent British, the Lower Mississippi French, the Southwest immovable in the centennial grip of Mexico, and Imperial Russia casting covetous glances down the Pacific as far south as San Francisco—not to speak of a far from improbable Japanese colonization of the West—the United States would now, in all likelihood, be a thickly populated and very Europeanized secondary power facing east and only east (if not, indeed, *two* such secondary powers, for the Civil War, unavoidable, might have had a different outcome). Little did Clark realize, when he wound up his campaign by conquering Vincennes with his tiny army of "Long Knives"—a conquest made possible by Vigo the amateur spy, an army equipped by Vigo the banker—that he was probably winning the most profitable victory in all the wars fought by the United States down to our day. True, the skirmish was over-advertised at the time: but what of it? It did the work: and "nothing succeeds like suc-

cess". Napoleon, who knew a good military leader when he saw one, was solely prompted by it when he fastened upon Clark the title of "Generalissimo, with the rank of Major-General in the French Armies"; while quiet, ultra-conservative President Coolidge for once led, instead of following, public opinion when he remarked in his annual message to Congress on December 6, 1927:

> "The historic character and the importance of the Vincennes victory are too little known and understood; they gave us not only the Northwest Territory, but by means of that the prospect of reaching the Pacific."

And even more forcibly Judge Law, in a very able address on "The Colonial History of Vincennes":

> "I have accurately and critically weighed and examined all the results produced by any contests in which we were engaged during the Revolutionary War; in my opinion, for the immense benefits acquired and the signal advantages obtained by it for the whole Union, it was second to no enterprise undertaken during that struggle. The whole credit of this conquest belongs to two men: General George Rogers Clark, and Colonel Francis Vigo."

"Clark, *and Vigo*": yet Clark, his weaknesses forgotten by all save a few historians, has become a nationally known and revered hero: rescued during the present century from the comparative oblivion naturally following his earlier excess of popularity, his name has been inserted into even the most elementary history textbooks; special postage stamps were issued in his honor; all encyclopedias stress his patriotic services; the United States appropriated one million dollars for a national memorial to him on the sesqui-centennial of the Battle of Vincennes; while Vigo, practically forgotten in forty-seven and one-half of the forty-eight States, lives now only as the dearly beloved *ange gardien* of his immediate neighbors, who showered upon him during his lifetime all the honors they could bestow, and then named after him a county and a township in Indiana, a street in Vincennes, a Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and so forth; but elsewhere he is hardly even a name. Take almost any history of Indiana, or of British rule in America, or of the "Midwest frontier": his name will be found mentioned once or twice, casually, as that of the "Spanish merchant who befriended Clark". When I wrote—in Italy and

from American notes—my first article on Vigo, which appeared in the magazine GERARCHIA for October, 1929, I had to face the fact that none of the world-renowned Italian *biblioteche* had ever been acquainted with the name of that illustrious son of Italy. But does America, the theatre of his chief exploits, fare much better? In such large Public Libraries as those of New York, and even of St. Louis—a city the commerce of which Vigo held at one time in the hollow of his hand—the only entry under "Vigo" at the time of writing is a two-page article upon the celebrated "Vigo Claim": the claim for reimbursement by the United States of Vigo's most unselfish advances, which were refunded only ninety-nine years later, long after the poor patriot who had lost his all by trusting America's "I.O.U." had been laid into a pauper's grave at the expense of the city—the undertaker in turn waiting forty years for the payment of his bill! It is a heart-breaking, yet inspiring story; and I for one fail to see why our Hollywood friends who are always looking for attractive "plots" do not put on the screen, without the adornment of their fanciful embellishments, the life story of this extraordinary character:—this patriotic Italian who became

so exclusively American; this Merchant Prince who equipped an army and then sold his family silver to purchase food when he was a nonagenarian; this semi-illiterate Trustee of the University of Vincennes; this host to the first Governor of the Northwest Territory, whose quarters were gratefully declined as "too sumptuous" by the Governor, but who passed away in a dismal boarding house; this cunning gentleman who technically kept the parole he had given to the British, yet interpreted it so as to deal England her death blow as the mistress of the vast region south of the Great Lakes; this Latin lover of romance who came near giving a Spanish bride to Clark and ended by taking an American bride himself; this "Jack-of-all-trades" desperately needed by Patrick Henry, by George Rogers Clark, by Governor Harrison, by Secretary Knox, who, when once the job was done, was left in the lurch by everybody, with pretty words and still prettier promises.

CHAPTER II

From Muleteer to Governor's Partner

AND now that the background is, in its main contours at least, outlined on the canvas, let the "subject" step in front of it, for his first sitting.

Francesco Vigo (pronounced VEE-GO, with the tonic accent on the first syllable, please, for he was an Italian, not a Frenchman!), who would some day be nicknamed "The Spanish Merchant" from British Detroit to Creole New Orleans, was an Italian from the former Sardinian States, born at Mondoví, Province of Cuneo, Piedmont.

All authorities agree that Mondoví was his birthplace. But *when* had he been born there? Documentary evidence seemed vague on that point, quite essential to a biographer. The problem of identifying his birth certificate—a problem which soon assumed an importance more national than personal, since the usual Italo-phobe element wasted no time in getting

to work—presented itself to me from the very beginning of my Vigo studies, reaching only this winter a definitive and satisfying solution. I hope I am not wrong in assuming that the chain of events which led at last to the happy discovery of the conclusive document may possibly interest my readers.

The date of Colonel Vigo's birth had been variously placed all the way from 1739 to 1748. "Vigo Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution", when renewing the gravestone placed on Vigo's tomb, after weighing fairly carefully all the evidence then available, stated that he died "March 22, 1836, aged 96"—which would put his birth back to 1740, one of the oldest dates suggested. A number of Vigos were living in Mondoví then, but the Mondoví Register of Births made no connection with the Vigo family during that year. Since, however, Vigo's contemporaries were all agreed that he had called himself a native of Mondoví, my friend Dr. Castruccio, Italian Consul General in Chicago, requested the Mayor of Mondoví to investigate *how near 1740* a Francesco Vigo had been born there.

The Mayor replied that on November 9, 1742, a Francesco Ignazio Vigo had been born

and baptized in his city (Register of Births and Baptisms of Mondoví Cathedral, year 1742, folio 27). The date 1742 being close enough to 1740, I would have felt pretty well satisfied that the proper document had been located, were it not for two facts which made me still doubtful. One was that the more I investigated the activities of my hero, the more I found that he was undergoing hardships in the forest fastnesses *in the first and even the second decade of the nineteenth century,* such as a person about to reach and even surpass the biblical "three-score-years-and-ten", no matter how hardy, could not reasonably be expected to endure; in 1810, for instance, he spent weeks among the bellicose and uncouth Shawnees, which seems a bit over-ambitious for a man of sixty-eight, who had known the comparative ease contingent upon his being for many years the leading citizen of Vincennes. The other fact, perhaps even more disturbing to a conscientious historian, was that on one side of the birth certificate of the Francesco Ignazio Vigo born in 1742 appeared the rather vague word "OBIIT"—"he died". When? How? The Mondoví Register of Deaths yielding no corresponding entry, the Curate of that Cathedral

suggested that the child, who had been born as well as baptized on the said November 9th, might have died also on that same day, the fact being thus rudimentarily recorded: not too regular a procedure, but not without precedent in cases where a child is born dying, and one entry was considered sufficient, in less exacting days, for the three essential events of his ephemeral existence: birth, baptism, and death. Yet that was just a guess. On the other hand, I thought, the Mondoví authorities may have made that informal notation on one side of our hero's birth certificate when they heard through his relatives that he had died in America, and while waiting for a copy of a death certificate which in all probability Mondoví did not request and Vincennes did not submit. A Francesco Vigo had unofficially died—that was all. I confess that I was puzzled, and determined to continue my hunt.

Of course, against the argument of Colonel Vigo's birth either in 1740 or in 1742 stood a remarkable letter written by the very reputable and accurate Major Ewing to Mr. Mann Butler, from Vincennes, on September 29, 1833, in which the Major, at the express request of his correspondent, describes Vincennes con-

ditions as told him personally by Vigo, adding the significant phrase: *"Although Colonel Vigo is now in his eighty-sixth year, his memory is still good."* That would place Vigo's birth in 1747, which would be more logical from a number of angles. But the document appeared to have lost all its historical value when one read the postscript: "He [Vigo] was a native of Genoa", etc. Now, if one thing was sure about Vigo's birth, it was that the event had taken place in Mondoví: all documents, all reminiscences agreed on that, and the Vigos are an old Mondoví family, hardly represented at Genoa. So, the Ewing evidence was, for once, to be discarded as unreliable. I left that clue with regret; also, puzzling over a problem, not biographical, but philological, which said letter had raised in my mind:—Why should Major Ewing have begun his letter speaking of Vigo in the present ("Colonel Vigo *is* . . ."), but should have used the imperfect in the postscript ("He *was* a native of Genoa. . . .")? It might, of course, be a slip of the pen, on the part of one who had intended to say "He *WAS BORN* at Genoa", and thought of the word "native" when he had already written "He *WAS*". Perhaps I was going too far with my

mania for the psychological rather than the literal interpretation of documents, which are primarily supposed to yield facts, not clues. However, would not my friend Dr. Castruccio insist with the Mondoví authorities for official records on any Vigos born there as late as 1747?

My patient friend did; in fact, he had already done so. The Rev. Giuseppe Spinardi, Curate of the Mondoví Cathedral, urged to investigate vital statistics of the whole Vigo family before 1750, sent an official copy, now in my possession, of the following Certificate of Birth and Baptism:

> "DIE TERTIA DECEMBRIS DICTI ANNI 1747 BAPTIZATUS FUIT A ME ANTONIO MURATORE CURATO CATHEDRALIS SANCTI DONATI CIVITATIS MONTEREGALIS *JOSEPH MARIA FRANCISCUS* EADEM DIE NATUS EX MATHEO *VIGO* ET MARIA MAGDALENA IUGALIBUS. PATRINI FUERUNT DOMINUS FRANCISCUS THOMATIS ET MARIA VIGO." (Parish Register of Mondoví Cathedral, year 1747, folio 129.)

So, a *"Joseph Maria Francesco"* Vigo, who later would surely be called simply *"Francesco"* —the name of Christ's "parents" being often added to a boy's name at baptism merely to make him more holy—had been born at Mondoví on December 3rd, 1747, the very year referred to in Major Ewing's letter, previously discarded as unreliable because of its postscript. I made up my mind that I must see what that Ewing document, which I knew only through a copy, looked like. I went at once to Madison, Wis., to consult the original in the Draper Collection, one of the glories of the Library of the University of Wisconsin.

The Draper Collection is a mine, a joy, and a despair at the same time. It consists of over four hundred bound volumes of letters, bills, clippings, reports, maps, plans, military rosters, surveyors' drawings, legal deeds, and what not, relating to early American history, with the emphasis on the heart of the Continent. It was indexed with meticulous care, but according to a preposterous plan, by Dr. Draper himself. The Clark Manuscripts were my aim; I had no difficulty in finding the Ewing letter. I naturally read it again in detail, both the body of it and the postscript, although I knew it almost by

heart. A faint pencil note after the postscript attracted my attention: it said, "A note in Mann Butler's hand", and was obviously in Dr. Draper's handwriting. Oh, joys of original research! Now everything appeared in its true light, the riddle was solved: the letter written by Ewing to Butler, stating indirectly that Colonel Vigo was born in 1747, was indeed a reliable document; but Butler—who, it happened, possessed a handwriting not dissimilar from that of Ewing—had at some later time *added at the foot of the Ewing letter his own biographical notes,* unauthoritatively gathered, *about Vigo,* then dead (hence the word *"was"*). The Butler addition had been generally accepted as a Ewing postscript; but the ever-careful Dr. Draper, now long dead, had warned future Vigo biographers not to be led astray by appearances. Perhaps he had been caught in the trap himself, and was cautioning others.

We have pretty securely established, therefore, our *terminus a quo:* Francesco Vigo, son of Matteo and Maria Maddalena Vigo, was born and baptized on December 3rd, 1747, at Mondoví, now in Italy, and then in those Sardinian States which were the very cradle of

United Italy. He became known as "The Spanish Merchant" merely because he was the leading merchant of the Spanish city of Saint Louis. The customary Italo-phobes who are repeating apropos of Vigo the same procedure attempted at the expense of poor Christopher Columbus—first, defining his exploits as secondary; second, asserting that he was not an Italian after all—will please note that Vigo could not possibly have been more Italian than he was, having been born a subject of that Royal Family of Savoy which rules Italy today. In fact, despite sundry allegiances forced upon him by circumstances before he freely chose to become an American, he continued for a long time to call himself an Italian and was proud of it, as one may discover by referring to the roster of the Militia under arms in Saint Louis in the year 1780, there finding that Vigo shared with a certain Thomas Ubaldi the honor of entering his name followed by the word *ITALIANO*. True, the Italian who feels too elated by such a discovery can quickly be made to come down to earth by being shown that Thomas Ubaldi's pride of race faltered so decidedly at a later date that he changed his name to Thomas Waldi; while the few other Italians then under

arms in "Upper Louisiana" made no such patriotic profession of faith as Vigo, and preferred to label themselves Spaniards or Frenchmen. Not that I blame them, poor chaps: it took nothing short of heroism to label yourself an Italian in those days, long before Italy as a separate entity appeared on the map, even if only in the guise of a Puppet Kingdom under the thumb of a self-styled Frenchman from the most Italian Island of Corsica, Napoleon Bonaparte. Well, Vigo did possess that heroism.

One could hardly believe that Vigo's *Italianità* would have to be defended so strenuously, in order to persuade individuals and nations either unwilling or constitutionally unable to give our race credit whenever it does deserve such credit. "Mondoví" becomes a very imaginary but very Spanish "Mondios"—a sort of geographical oath, I should say—in the official publication sold to all visitors of the historic section of Old Vincennes.—Mr. Esarey, in his "History of Indiana", states that when Vincennes became American ". . . no *Frenchman* except Colonel Vigo held office for a considerable period".—And what havoc they all play with Vigo's simple, melodious Italian name! If the Scottish Fur Merchants of Canada entered

Vigo's name on their books as "Mr. Vigoe", and John Dodge calls him "Virgue" in a letter to Colonel Clark, Bishop Carroll of Baltimore, who entrusted to Vigo confidential messages for his priest at Vincennes, Father Gibault, stole a march on them all by styling him "Monsieur Vigault", a nifty annexation to the crafty Jesuit's nationality! It is easy to accuse the natural limitations of the time; but our contemporaries—insofar as contemporaries still remember our poor side-tracked Vigo—have not done much better; since the same pronunciation as that obviously intended by the Bishop, with the accent upon the last syllable, appears in the poem by Francis Morrison still sung by the school children of Vigo County while the Vigo bell is tolling:

"What is the story you tell,
Old Vigo, Old Vigo?"
"I have only the tongue of a bell,
But ye know, ye know!
Look into the past if ye can
Long ago, long ago,
And know the heart of a man—
Ye know! Ye know!—
Who planted the fruitful seed
That gave me unto your need,
Old Vigo! Old Vigo!"

The poem goes on, but I shall spare my readers. I am only interested in the fact that in it the name "Vigo" is made to rhyme with "ye know" and "long ago" which gives it a French *tournure,* even though four million Italians in America ought to have given this country some faint ideas on the basic laws which govern the pronunciation of Italian names. Heaven knows, we have filled the American daily papers to the brim with Italian names during the last fifty years, for one reason or another—mainly, I fear, *another!*

But even certain best-intentioned historians supply us with ample evidence, if not of unwillingness, at least of constitutional inability to understand that Italy is a country, and not a personal opinion. Surely nobody tried harder to do justice to Vigo than Judge John Law, the author of the very able and illuminating "Colonial History of Vincennes", and John T. Faris in his "Romance of Forgotten Men". Yet the former, after correctly telling us that Vigo was A SARDINIAN FROM MONDOVI WHO RAN AWAY FROM HOME TO ENLIST IN A SPANISH REGIMENT, forgets himself two pages later and calls him A SPANIARD BY BIRTH. And the latter, writing at

a time when geographical ignorance is no longer tolerable, places Mondoví, Piedmont, upon the island of Sardinia, and, starting from so preposterous a premise, reaches such distressing corollaries as these:

> "Very likely Vigo's parents were very possibly Spanish, for though Sardinia was an Italian territory, it had belonged to Spain until a little while before the birth of the boy whose life was so wonderfully tied up with America. . . . It has been suggested that the Vigo family may have come from Vigo, one of the attractive old time cities of Spain, located on Vigo Bay."

Evidently Mr. Faris was not aware that not only in Mondoví, but in several other Italian cities, long lines of "Vigos" make it unnecessary for him or anybody else to go to Spain for explanation of that family name; thus every student of Italian with some knowledge of books of the Risorgimento period must remember the name of the very Italian publishing house of Vigo in Livorno, the city which the English language so picturesquely re-christened *Leghorn*. Back of the whole misrepresentation is the confusion between the ISLAND OF SARDINIA and the so-called "SARDINIAN STATES", which in addition to the moderately

important island of Sardinia (from which the rulers of said Sardinian States obtained Royal rank, for historical reasons), included two most prominent regions of continental Italy: Piedmont, and Liguria. Not until we claim that Magellan was an American because he died in those Philippine Islands which were to fly the American flag four centuries later, can we claim that the Vigos of Mondoví must be Spaniards because they belonged to a Kingdom DERIVING ITS OFFICIAL TITLE FROM AN ISLAND WHICH HAD AT SOME TIME BEEN SPANISH! Francesco Vigo had no more Spanish blood than Gandhi or Lenin.

Early in life, following the spirit of *Wanderlust* which lurks in the heart of every ambitious Italian, he ran away from home, eventually enlisting as a private in the Spanish army for service in the colonies. That his work at that time was that of muleteer I hereby report on the unsupported authority of Mr. Lockridge; I can well believe it, though, having served as an officer in the Italian Army and remembering that whenever I asked for volunteers to drive even the humblest of mule carts, almost every soldier in the company used to step forth and offer his services. *("Oh che bel mestiere—Fare*

il carrettiere"; when all is said and done, you can learn all the essentials of Italian nature by studying the librettos of Italian operas!) And suppose he was only a muleteer: what of it? Vigo's abilities, like those of most persons from mountain regions, developed slowly: he was surely no *enfant prodige,* and he made his way in life only when approaching middle age.

Spain soon sent him to Havana with his regiment; but he does not seem to have stayed there long. According to Mann Butler, he reached Cuba in 1774; and we have evidence that on the following year he had already left the island. It was customary for the Spanish military authorities to detail the more alert of their troops from Cuba, a colony already definitely organized, to New Orleans, a city both very young (founded in 1718) and very troublesome, on the edge of the great Wilderness. Vigo was ordered there.

In "The Queen of the Gulf" we definitely trace our man by means of a most thorough register of the local troops: on September 12, 1775, *Francisco* Vigo appears as a "Fusilero" of the "Tercera Compañia, Milicia de la Nueva Orleans"—incidentally under a Captain Martiny. (The reader will please note the

wealth of Italian names deliciously purified by an exotic and redeeming *y* all over the Mississippi Valley in the early days: Martiny, Tonty, Leonardy, Stefanelly, Pouricelly, Montardy, De Generelly—fine "Spaniards" or "Frenchmen" indeed! Let certain people remember their true nationality, so thinly camouflaged, when they suggest that Italian history in the heart of the Continent begins and ends with Chicago's "Public Enemy Number One".)

Once in the Creole City, Vigo, sensing the limitless possibilities of that bridgehead of civilization, must have begun to feel that he was ready "to do or die"; he soon joined a picked body of irregular troops, particularly valuable in case of foreign or piratical attack, whose duties were as variable as the moods of the Gulf of Mexico, and whose risks must have been, considering the conditions, appalling. Adjutant-Major Delassize thus describes that outfit, in his roster of "Milices de la Nouvelle Orléans et son District" (French having taken the place of Spanish as the official language of New Orleans in the meantime), a faithful copy of which can be found in the Howard Memorial Library at New Orleans:

"VOYAGEURS SANS DEMEURE EN VILLE, TOUS HOMMES DE RESSOURCE—BEAUCOUP DE MARINS DANS LE NOMBRE, LES AUTRES CREOLES—TOUS TIRANT BIEN, ET HOMMES DE FATIGUE. PRESQUE TOUS EN VOYAGE ACTUELLEMENT, LES UNS EN CHASSE DANS LES RIVIERES, D'AUTRES ENGAGES POUR RAMER DANS LES VOITURES QUI FONT LE COMMERCE DES POSTES, LES AUTRES A LA PECHE A LA MER OU DANS LES LACS."

Adjutant Major Delassize, when you wrote that description of colorful colonial life from some stuffy corner of the Cabildo, did you know that you may have been a statistician to your *Commandant,* but that you are a true poet to some of us? Personally, that official entry for the ultimate benefit of your War Department (which of course never looked at it but filed it away in the course of office routine) brings visions of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Manon Lescaut and Jack London and Joaquim Miller, all mixed together *en macédoine,* only lusciously seasoned *à la créole* for local color. Probably the good Adjutant had tried his best to be businesslike, but, like an earlier and far more fa-

mous poet, *"quod temptabat scribere, versus erat"*.

The official change of languages in the New Orleans of that period could hardly have disturbed our Francesco—Francisco—François Vigo; in fact, his native Piedmontese dialect, so akin to French, was sure to help him, and the ease with which he readjusted to the new requirements was likely to place him in a better light with his superiors. But, plainly, by this time our hero, while probably always respectful of authority like a good Piedmontese, must have felt a bit detached, aloof from his superiors. The MAN Vigo, a mere speck in the immensity of the Forest Primæval, has ceased to be a "hay foot—straw foot" martinet, helpless at the mercy of picayune-minded corporals, and learns how to make himself worthy of God's own gifts in the admiring contemplation of God's lavish creation. An animal once more, he re-acquires primitive man's animal flair. Insects, fevers, a treacherous fauna and flora; huge rivers which help you to travel today, and swallow you up tomorrow; an "incredible quantity of buffalo and bear", as Father Marest, S.J., wrote to Father Germon of the same Order; Indians, friendly and unfriendly, whose

languages must all be learned—both *vocal* and *sign* languages—if one would escape from them or trade with them; and all around you and all over you, for hundreds and hundreds of miles and for months at a time, silence and solitude.

Yet our man found in such conditions his proper habitat: in no time, this son of an overcrowded Land which has been the playground of civilization for so many centuries, became the perfect denizen of the Wilderness. The brave soldier, as a true *homme de ressource et de fatigue,* soon pushed forward as far north as Saint Louis, official residence of His Excellency Don Fernando de Leyba, Governor of Upper Louisiana. The Post was small, and presently the two men came face to face. They fully understood their mutual needs, and, while starting from the opposite ends of the social ladder, they had the wisdom to find at once a common meeting ground.

The acquaintance between the alert, adventurous yet unimpulsive Piedmontese, and the Spanish official who chafed seeing all around him fur merchants large and small make money in no time, yet could not without disgrace enter as their competitor the business arena, was the making of Vigo. He needed a de Leyba; and

de Leyba certainly needed a Vigo. This is the period from which it would be most fascinating to obtain letters—correspondence exchanged between the two men. But, while some non-committal bills and accounts may at a future date come to light, I feel confident that of actual *letters* we shall never discover any: one of the men probably could not write, and the other certainly shouldn't!

The gap will have to be filled by using logic in lieu of direct evidence. Remember that the young settlement of Saint Louis, inhabited mainly by French Canadians who called it "Pain-Court" ("Short of Bread"), had been ceded by France to Spain as recently as 1762; thus de Leyba found himself a lone Spaniard among quasi-Frenchmen, who would grumble and sulk if they saw their alien Governor use his lofty post as a springing board for trading ventures along the same lines—pelts, whiskey, rifles—in which they themselves were more humbly engaged; yet de Leyba's temptation to do so must have been overpowering, as he was far away from all possibility of official interference and unusually autonomous in a rich new country which was fairly crying out for exploitation. Then there was the important item of "official

presents to the Indians"—tangible evidences of a custom steadily followed by France, Spain, and England in the Mississippi wilderness, which practically compelled a Governor to purchase profusely, if not to sell: if de Leyba could only find the right man through whom to transact these various forms of business! It could not be one of those doubtful Frenchmen; it must not be a member of a large Fur Concern; it had to be somebody loyal and humble, acquainted with the New Orleans market whence the "presents" must come, and thoroughly liked by the Indians.

Vigo, on the other hand, with the intuition of a true Latin must have sensed that Fortune was about to pass within reach of him, and prepared himself to grab her locks securely on the fly. This soldier whose barracks now consisted of a green or brown wilderness five hundred miles square must have felt like a schoolboy who is given the latch-key for the first time in his life. What a chance for the man who would qualify! If de Leyba would only keep him in "Upper Louisiana", nominally on the military roster, and yet use him as fur buyer, and spy, and importer of presents, and Indian interpreter, and messenger between the Spaniards, the French,

the Americans, and, as I shall presently show, those men without a country, scattered through the vast Valley, who were beginning to come over from his own native Land, then he, Vigo, would be a happy and truly useful man, would prosper, and would make his benefactor prosper.

The two men entered into secret partnership; forming an alliance which their neighbors only surmised at first, but which became a matter of public record at de Leyba's untimely death.

CHAPTER III

Farewell to Spanish Arms

IF Vigo's opportunity had been unique, we must also realize that business conditions in the Saint Louis of his day were similarly unique. True, they revolved around the fur trade; but the reader, who probably knows of fur trading as practised in later days by the Astors and their competitors in the Pacific Northwest, would have hard work in identifying here either the machinery or the material constituting that trade.

In the first place, "Pain Court" was no Astoria; then de Leyba did not have the vision and the wealth of a John Jacob Astor; then the Indians, still unconquered, were in a different mood. Here diplomacy came first, ubiquitousness second, knowledge of pelts last. Spain would take de Leyba's pelts, never mind how prepared for marketing, never mind what creatures of the woods they had kept warm. How different from the Canadian trade, so systematic, with its division of the work between

"lobbyists" in London, bankers in Montreal, outfitters in Detroit, and so on! Here in Saint Louis, owing to the fact that the settlement was at the extreme northern end of the Spanish possessions, the all-absorbing subject was the matter of "presents for the Indians", upon which rested the security of that isolated Spanish Post; although to a greater or lesser degree all European colonizing Powers in those days spent vast sums in "Indian presents", to be distributed either directly by Government agents or through traders. In fact, since pelts were secured partly in exchange, "it will perhaps be doing no violence to the truth", says W. E. Stephens in his *"Northwest Fur Trade"*, "to say that the fur trade was a subsidized industry."

These "Indian presents" consisted, first, of rum, "without which the trader would never think of going into the Indian Country" (Stephens); then came *"fusils"* with pertinent ammunition, to furnish the savages with the means of hunting more efficiently for the ultimate profit of the White Man (in other words, the White Man's greed supplied the weapons which so often killed him); finally, "dry goods", or cloth, beads, knives (even scalping knives, to

the eternal shame of the history of man's lust for gain), mirrors, thread, and so forth. Once the habit of getting something for nothing had been acquired by the savages, there was no stopping of it. We shall see at a later time how much the United States suffered when, against Vigo's advice, it introduced the policy of "No more presents". Aside from the natural indignation of the Indians, the question assumed a particularly delicate international aspect when the British, by the Treaty of Paris, ceded to the United States their part of the Mississippi Valley: because in order to protect her traders, to whom the Treaty guaranteed full trading rights, England continued to send presents to the Indians, which they considered as a function of White Man's Government, thus complicating the Anglo-American misunderstanding.

Naturally, there were ways and ways of presenting those goods. There are people who make you feel honored even if they present you with a burned match; others will disappoint you even if they give you a million dollars. To begin with, the Lord is not the only one who "loveth a cheerful giver". Then such giver must know how to distribute and how to time his presents, how to let others know (or how to prevent them

from knowing) that a certain valuable object has been donated, and so on. In other words, the giver must have tact and discrimination.

Vigo was eminently well fitted for all his new duties incumbent upon the position of Governor's secret agent; and his "silent partner" must have congratulated himself upon his find. In the last analysis, then as now, business success (and not *business* success only, for that matter!) depends primarily upon your ability to get along with your prospective customers; which in turn rests upon your personality and upon your skill in speaking your customers' language, both in a literal and in a figurative sense. As to Vigo's personality, even if the results he accomplished did not prove its striking qualities, the consensus of opinion among those who came into contact with him, surely would; and when it comes to the matter of skill in speaking all the languages of the Valley, both White and Red, he not only talked them well, but so perfectly that he always "sold" his idea as well as his wares; throughout his long life, Vigo was sought by everybody as spokesman whenever such "sale" did not look too easy. With the Red Man he had the great advantage of lack of formal education, lack of national

support, lack of familiarity with all those comforts and refinements of the White Man's civilization which consciously or subconsciously end by winning most Whites over to a general sense of "allegiance to the White Race" which the Red Man could detect a mile away, destroying the basis for an understanding during actual negotiations. How essential are these *imponderabilia!* Many years of the teaching of a language and of the mentality which uses it as its tool have persuaded me that the foreign mind which comes into direct contact with such language and such mentality in a condition of *self-satisfaction over its own civilization,* encounters exceptional difficulties. That is why so-called "Great Peoples" give us so pitiful a percentage of good linguists; and that is why out of so many thousands of soldiers and officers who learn or try to learn some elements of the languages of their enemies in war time, not one in a thousand ever becomes proficient in them, although a fighter has so much time on his hands while in the trenches: it is a study seasoned with hate and contempt.

And even when it came to the actual languages spoken by the White settlers in the Valley, Vigo was at an advantage over anyone else.

French was the main tongue there; and Vigo's own native speech, the Piedmontese *patois,* did not need much readjusting to pass as French: most "French" waiters in New York, to this day, are Piedmontese, and speak their dialect to each other in the kitchen, but French with all Continentalized American patrons—since it means higher tips! Residence in New Orleans, also, must have perfected Vigo's "conversational French". Then came, next in importance before the George Rogers Clark expeditions, the Spanish language; and Vigo's experience in Spain and Cuba helped him in that quarter. Finally, scattered here and there, were Italian settlers; and one can hardly imagine today the glee with which they must have hailed this novel gentleman-*coureur de bois,* when he brought them the speech of their childhood or youth, half forgotten after years of Spanish, Canadian, or French camouflage! Do not ask me how those Italians got there: each settler was a special case, there having been no actual colonization schemes from Italy to the America of that day, except one in Florida which seems to have ended in eventual local absorption. Most of them came via the South (usually with one or more relays in the West Indies, which did not appear so foreign to the Genoese

since Columbus); some through the North, very few indeed from the East: adventurers, dreamers, fugitives, ex-sailors, ex-servants; the Cross and the Sword each brought a few; show me a corner of the earth to which some Italian has not been buffeted by Fate! Even that most inaccessible of places, the Island of Tristan da Cunha which is still without a flag, possesses its quota of Italians. And if in this day and generation the Italian "drummer" appearing in the home of an Italian miner's family in Western Pennsylvania could sell them a box of matches for a dollar, so inordinately happy are they at the sight of their countryman; what could Vigo not obtain from compatriots, ex-compatriots, or even children of compatriots, when his boat or boats hove to by the banks of some great muddy river, in the shadow of the earthworks of some tiny Fort? Jason landing in Colchis after his fateful quarry, Columbus putting ashore at San Salvador, Ulysses appearing before Nausicaa could not have caused a more absorbing sense of astonished wonderment in their beholders than must have been felt by many, especially the wives and the little ones whose horizon was so limited, when this Italian man of mystery landed, and brought, by his very presence, the

message of a civilization half-remembered, half dreamed of. No favor, no privilege would have been refused by any of the Italians in the Valley: Orietta, Cecire, Martini, Vissena, Peri who is recorded as a "scrivener" in 1767, Montardi who appears as a soldier in 1765; Sanguinetti and Stefanelli who were "prominent citizens" of Saint Louis in 1780, Brugnolo who was captain of a vessel pompously named *Chariot Royal* as early as 1753, De Reggio whose name is the oldest from Italy to appear in Old Saint Louis Cemetery at New Orleans, the Maltese families of Ferruggia, Grima, and Pace whose tombstones proudly proclaim them *"nativi di Malta, Italia"*. And so on with Campo, Filiberti, Pea, Vizzina, Leonardi, Pancrazi (Pancrass!), Tardivo (Tardiveau), all of Vincennes; Barabino the botanist at New Orleans, a Sarpy also of New Orleans who unexpectedly turns out to be a Serpe (see Journal of André Michaux); an Emiliano Yosti of Novara, an Antonio Bouis who stated that he was a Genoese but forgot to add what form (probably Buissone?) his name took in Genoa. The Raffiante and Bogliolo families at New Madrid; Bolsi, Ventura, Molina, Marti; Silvestro Labadia, a self-styled "Frenchman" in

the Saint Louis Militia of 1780, together with our more self-assertive friend Ubaldi-Waldi; Arco, whose boy by the Indian squaw Aramipinchicoue was the first child baptized at Kaskaskia; Bellissimi (Bellissime), Bormio, Corno, Bolli, Puricelli (Pourcelly!), De Generelli, Locatelli (Locatell); Iacomini, who is repeatedly referred to in documents as "Jean Baptiste Jacquemins," yet signs them each time, very legibly, *"IOVANI BAPTISTA IACOMINI."* And already some of the many migrant members of the large Tagliaferro, Di Negro, and Bertoldi families were beginning to come over and to start their American career under the names of Talifer, Denègre, and Berthold, the better to keep off their real racial track any student interested in their true origin. Poor Italy! *"La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure"*. . . . If here and there my list may have included a genuinely Spanish or French family, I apologize to my "Latin Sisters"; yet I feel sure that if a fair exchange of unfair claims could be made, it would be found that France and Spain submerged and camouflaged ten times as many early Americans of my race as I am trying to rescue from their unquestionably well-meant, but strictly un-historical clutch.

It will be noticed that with hardly any exception, these names are North Italian, and mostly from Piedmont and Liguria—the "Sardinian States". This is important from the standpoint of Vigo's hold upon such of those men as he may have come into contact with, since the line of demarkation between North and South Italians was quite deep at that time. The Neapolitans and Sicilians of later-day immigration into America would have been culturally and linguistically like strangers to him, since their fusion with their more Northern brothers does not antedate much, if any, the epic of the Liberator, Garibaldi. However, with these people born within sight of the Western Alps, Vigo would feel thoroughly at home.

But as he moved further north into the Continent, he was beginning to come into contact with another race, another language, another religion, another habit of the mind: the English. Englishmen from England, and anti-British Englishmen from the American colonies of Virginia and Kentucky.

How they must have puzzled Vigo at first, these English: a people so religious and so mercantile—Bible and pelts, pelts and Bible. And so mean to our hero's Indian friends: use them

today, trick them tomorrow, browbeat them whenever possible. Difficult to interpret, too: they never tell a full lie, never a full truth. And they don't care to make love to squaws, nor to baptize papooses. But as he discussed them with Canadian or Cherokee, with *coureur de bois* and half-breed guide, and began uneasily dealing with them in the woods near Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Sainte Géneviève, or as their pirogues unexpectedly met in the solitude of the vast rivers, he must have soon perceived that the English-speaking peoples in the Midwest wilderness belonged to two distinct types, not only politically at war with each other (what was a mere war along the Mississippi in the eighteenth century?), but hopelessly divided on certain basic social issues, such as, for instance, the ultimate destiny of their Continent: the Englishman wanted it to stay European, the American felt it to be "his own show" and was inordinately eager for the curtain to rise. Fundamentally, subconsciously, this simple foreigner gave an as yet unborn United States his heart's overwhelming allegiance. Good-bye forever, Europe! He was tired of "colonies" anyway: French, Spanish, and what not; the Mississippi Valley during the eighty-nine years

of Vigo's life was as shameful an example as can be found of how little a Colonial Power can care for the patriotism of its colonists, who were gambled about as pawns in some distant game. Well, he must have thought, here is one group at last which plays *its own* game: the game may or may not amount to much, but the players are certainly at it in dead earnest. The "Long Knives" or Kentuckians were all over the Valley; they were led by a young officer from "the West" (the mountains of Virginia, and Kentucky) who caught Vigo's fancy, and whose fancy was also caught by this most unusual *Spanish Merchant* who, like those Medieval Pisans who were Kings in Sardinia but plain citizens in republican Pisa, was a soldier in the Saint Louis Barracks, but a Monarch of Trade in the Forest. This officer, as the reader has probably surmised, was George Rogers Clark.

This sudden *simpatia* between Clark and Vigo, amply supported by historical evidence, solves a problem which has puzzled some of Clark's biographers: the speed with which not only were cordial relations established, but a warm feeling of friendship (soon amounting to unexpected intimacy) was created between the

pioneering Virginian, whose training could not have been irresistibly Hispanophile, and the polished, somewhat formal, strictly European Governor de Leyba. Clark was the first to be surprised by it, yet never suspected Vigo's friendly hand. Soon Clark was writing to Colonel Mason:

> . . . "An intimacy has commenced between de Leyba and myself. He omitted nothing in his power to prove his attachment to the Americans." (*George Rogers Clark Papers,* in Illinois Historical Collections.)

And to Governor Patrick Henry:

> . . . "This Gentleman [de Leyba] interests himself much in favor of the States—more so than I could have expected." (*Ibidem.*)

Our tactful Piedmontese had known how to bridge the racial gap!

This "intimacy" which Clark announced he had established with Governor de Leyba was so unusually close that, despite Spanish etiquette cutting off an official's home from all business associates, there soon appeared romance from an unexpected quarter in the life of Lieutenant-Colonel Clark. We do not wish to wax gushingly sentimental over this episode, but make

bold to suggest to certain celebrated biographers of Clark that the flame which soon burned to the core the romantic Virginian cannot be waived aside as immaterial by a historian: I am aware that love affairs, just because they supply the *leit-motif* to the writer of historical novels, irritate most serious biographers, who would like to see their heroes forever performing deeds apt to extol them above most men, instead of stooping to a cosmic urge which could hardly be styled their chief distinguishing trait. And yet, as long as human nature remains what it is, love, and especially the love of an obscure young man for a lady of much higher social station, will be the greatest inspirer of daring and of self-confidence, spurring to deeds so heroic as to obliterate all society barriers. Clark fought the risky and almost quixotic Vincennes campaign not only for his Country, but for his Lady: the beautiful and accomplished Teresa de Leyba, daughter of His Excellency the Spanish Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Louisiana, and easily the prize of the Mississippi wilderness. The young Colonel must have realized (or was he made to realize it?) that his one chance to get her was to win fame, money, and power through an astounding military deed. He

plunged into the Vincennes adventure; but when it brought no power, hardly any lasting fame, and loss of even the little money he owned when he had started, Clark kept consistently away from Señorita de Leyba, and sailed forth on his career as a woman-hater and a man of far from temperate habits. As to Teresa, her father and mother died shortly after this time, while Vincennes was American but the region around it was in a state of practical anarchy: first the Governor went, then his wife. Alone and distracted, the girl was bound to gravitate down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where she had friends. The inevitable then happened: her native Spain held less terrors for her than this new world, too large, too eventful, not fit for a mere Spanish Señorita to live in: it had crushed her soul, more gentle than strenuous. The soothing arms of the Great Consoler, the Church, opened on Clark's former sweetheart: the nun who had been known in the world as Teresa de Leyba, uneventfully, and let us hope serenely, passed away in 1821. The Draper Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Wisconsin, which comprise invaluable "source material" for the study of Clark's life, contain an illumi-

nating letter written by Mrs. Temple, Clark's cousin, to Dr. Draper:

> "In the Spring of 1797 we removed to Kentucky. General Clark lived there at that time. He seemed to be fond of my society. Aunt said she had heard that George had seen a Spanish nun somewhere and fallen very deeply in love with her. Why he could not get her, she did not or could not tell. She said that was the reason why General Clark took no notice of ladies."

Still, Teresa de Leyba was not a nun at the time Clark met her, nor when the lovers last parted: whence this confusion? Again the Draper Manuscripts help us: Diana Gwathney, niece of General Clark, reports in one of them that "uncle would only mention her while he was intoxicated": naturally, in this condition a man's powers may possess a maximum of impulse, but they also exhibit a minimum of clarity. And as to the moral issue which emerges from Miss Gwathney's report, instead of waxing righteous as some writers (including Theodore Roosevelt in *The Winning of the West)* have done, let us be both sorrowful and understanding: sorrowful that so fine a man should have been given such a raw deal that more and

more frequently he sought oblivion in liquor, and understanding to the extent of admitting that for a Southern American military man of those days it would have been almost dishonorable not to become occasionally intoxicated!

What was Vigo's part in this romance? That he had some would be self-evident, from the very nature of things; yet it was to be feared that his apparent illiteracy or customary reluctance to write, taken together with Clark's unwillingness to discuss his romance with anyone, would leave us without any tangible evidence. But the evidence exists, and anybody who, in the face of such a document, doubts not only Vigo's encouragement of the lovers, but the love affair himself, appears to me to be going a bit too far in his assumption that reporting romance is tantamount to "romancing". Does a certain eminent biographer from Illinois expect a stenographic and dictaphonic report of the Clark-de Leyba trysts? On August 1, 1811, writing from Locust Grove near Louisville, Kentucky, at the end of a memorable epistle which will have to be referred to again in the course of this work, Clark answers Vigo's assurance that he "will never cease to put up prayers to Heaven that the evening of his

[Clark's] days may be serene and happy" in the following terms:

> "How happy would I be, could those sentiments of entreaty to a trustful Providence for a serene and happy evening be realized. But that Providence has long since denied me that boon. He (*sic*) has cut asunder life's tenderest string."

It is obvious from this unexpected personal touch, coming in a formal letter *from one who never even in the intimacy of his home referred to the matter,* that Vigo had been *au courant* of, and sympathetic with, the affair, even if the Spanish soldier, so heartily won over to the cause of America, had not been actually instrumental in trying to bring about an important political match between the two countries which were closest to his heart—which I personally, knowing the ways of the Italians, believe, but cannot prove. In any case, it stands to reason that the fur trader, "intelligence man", and importer whose business took him up and down the whole mid-Mississippi territory, would be the ideal man to carry messages between the two lovers, one of whom could not leave her home any more than the other could leave his military command, first at Kaskaskia

and then at Vincennes. And as for Clark unbosoming himself so, against all precedent, let us remember that no one could understand the pathos of his situation better than Vigo, whose career also had been by that time completely wrecked by America's ingratitude: Vigo who, if he would bring a bride into the Wilderness after his *beau geste* toward the United States, had to be satisfied with a buxom Elizabeth Shannon, who was only "under the skin" a sister of the sophisticated Teresa de Leyba.

* * *

Meanwhile Vigo, firmly established as the right-hand man of the Governor, was prospering wonderfully. The power of the "Spanish Merchant", increasing everywhere, had already become unparalleled in the triangle formed by Spanish Saint Louis, American Kaskaskia, and British Vincennes, and it remained so until de Leyba's death. In fact, an extremely interesting document, the Governor's Last Will and Testament (a copy of which may be seen in the Howard Memorial Library at New Orleans), is mostly a tribute to the sagacity, the power, and the honesty of Vigo, who is therein appointed testamentary executor and who appears in the document as practically the despot of de Leyba's finances:

. . . "The said testator has appointed for his testamentary executor Francisco Vigo, *Merchant,* residing in this Post, and for his substitute Benito Vasquez, *Lieutenant of Militia,* requesting them to take this charge, and placing in their hands all his goods. The said testator declares that all the furniture existing in the Government House is his personal property, so that no person can claim anything thereof, excepting, nevertheless, the goods *which M. Vigo has brought upon his last voyage,* and which belong to the presents for the Indians. The testator wishes and ordains that all his personal goods and effects, whatever their nature, be lawfully valued, and those which may be sold here to advantage to be sold; as regards those *which may be more advantageously sold at New Orleans, M. Vigo will send them to that city.* . . . The said testator, not having regulated his business with the said Vigo, he has given him two bills of exchange, *one for the sum of $2420, the other $1452;* by means of these sums all accounts between the testator and the said Vigo are liquidated and settled. . . . The testator wishes and ordains that *M. Sarpy,* who has transacted business with him, and all others in the same case, should render their accounts to the same M. Vigo, his testamentary executor."

This Will is dated at Saint Louis, June 10, 1780, shortly before the testator's death. I have

taken the liberty of italicizing some particularly significant passages in the document, which seem to call for comment:

—Vigo is herein described as *Merchant,* not Soldier, although he belonged at the time, nominally at least, to the very Command at the order of the substitute testamentary executor, Lieutenant Benito Vasquez;

—Vigo had "brought upon his last voyage" some "presents for the Indians": it is obvious that his last voyage had taken him all the way down to New Orleans or all the way up to Detroit (less likely), as in mid-Mississippi Valley there was no store selling goods fit for presents to the Indians, which might not also be bought at Saint Louis. And my theory that Vigo had just returned from the long journey to the Creole Metropolis seems strengthened by that section of the will in which the testator shows that he considers his executor a good judge of New Orleans values ("those which may be more advantageously sold at New Orleans . . .");

—de Leyba, having some unfinished business with Vigo at the time he was taken ill and dictated his testament, settles it with two

notes for a figure in the neighborhood of four thousand dollars—which would have been a large sum for a soldier to handle anyway, even if it constituted the bulk of a deal, let alone the tail-end of one;

—The "M. Sarpy" mentioned at the end of the will is obviously the New-Orleanese whom we discovered to have been a "Serpe" if not a "Sarpi", Italian in either case: it is very likely that de Leyba entered into business relations with this Italian through his Italian partner Vigo. And whether or not it supports my theory that some share of Vigo's success in his Saint Louis ventures was due to the *entrée* he had with those Italians of whom almost every settlement in the Valley possessed at least one family, it certainly constitutes one more document of Italian activity along "the Father of Waters" in the eighteenth century.

And now if we would compare this testament with another Saint Louis document, the already mentioned Official Roster of the Militia of the Settlement for the same year 1780, where we find Vigo's name entered as "Italiano", we will notice several interesting facts. One is that

Vigo, by this time a rich trader, styled a "Merchant" in the will of his own Governor, could now afford to broadcast his true nationality even in a foreign military register: if Old World circumstances had made him a soldier of Spain, very well then, he was one, but "Italiano"; and Americans will bear in mind that when Vigo became an American Citizen, at Vincennes some time after this, the nationality which he sacrificed at the altar of his new allegiance was really the Italian—although his services to the American cause by that time had been such that no formal oath was asked by the people of Vincennes from their hero; in fact, it would have been grotesque, since he represented the first instrumentality of their Americanization! Another fact worthy of notice is that although Vigo had already risen so high in civil life, in military life he was left just a plain soldier: perhaps the easiest arrangement for de Leyba, as it attracted less attention toward his financial partner, and therefore less interference with him from other sources; after all, many people must have been jealous of Vigo's success. Finally, let us not pass by the tell-tale fact that a plain soldier of the Saint Louis Post is made testamentary executor, while the Lieu-

tenant in charge of said Post is to act as a mere understudy—a substitute in case something happened to his precious soldier!

Indeed the de Leyba testament is a high compliment to Vigo; but it is the last from that quarter. Within a year the de Leyba family had written its final chapter in the history of Saint Louis: the elders had died and been buried there; Teresa had buried herself in a far-away convent, where her very memories of the New World must have seemed like bizarre dreams.

And with that, the Saint Louis chapter of Vigo's career was also nearing its end, despite the inevitably drawn-out business transactions contingent upon the execution of de Leyba's will. Let us return to the American chapter, which we left at the height of George Rogers Clark's sanguine hopes.

CHAPTER IV

Between the Jaws of the British Lion

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CLARK, his patriotism fanned by love as was his personal ambition, had become by this time a veritable dynamo. Patrick Henry, on January 2, 1778, had sent him two sets of instructions: one, public, asking him to organize Kentucky for defense; the other, secret, authorizing him to attack the British Post of Kaskaskia. (Kaskaskia, a French-Canadian settlement founded in 1700 by the Italian Tonti leading the Jesuit Priests Marest and Saint Cosme, was now owned by the English.) On the fateful Fourth of July of the year 1778, Clark conquered that Post of voluble allegiance, which had been so deliciously described by Father Meurin in 1764 as "Kaskaskia, COUNTRY OF THE ILLINOIS, PROVINCE OF LOUISIANA, DIOCESE OF QUEBEC"—a geographical combination sufficient to make us gasp even in this age of limited trains and of airships!

But Clark soon found out that a hold on Kaskaskia was of no significance without the reduction of the Fort of Vincennes, center of British power south of the Great Lakes; and the taking of Vincennes appeared totally beyond his means, held as it was by General Henry Hamilton, one of the ablest of Britain's officers in the New World, who had occupied it under conditions likely to force him to keep in possession against all odds. Hamilton had acquired Vincennes through the well-meaning but egregiously tactless act of a French Jesuit priest who has been allowed for over one hundred years to usurp much of the glory belonging in reality to Vigo, whose surpassing *savoir faire* recovered for America a Vincennes lost to her through the ill-timed enthusiasm of the Frenchman. It is about time that Father Gibault should be placed in his true light, which will show us a man vociferous in his love for America when such manifestations were highly dangerous to the cause, yet increasingly vacillating later, to the very edge of double dealing; and finally out-and-out dishonest to the point of appropriating goods which the United States granted *to his church,* when the said United States had turned down his own personal claims

together with those of Vigo. Poor Vigo! *He* was not the type of man that helps himself at the expense of others; and not only did he die penniless, but, to add insult to injury, he had to yield even his laurels to a harebrained and unreliable pastor, naturally glorified by the noisy fanfare of his logical supporters. What sort of inroads into public opinion can mere historical documentation make, when it is pitted against popular novels *à la* "Alice of Old Vincennes"? That is why, o pachiderms appropriately glorified in my preface, I think an honest biographer should at least try to make his story generally readable, in order to put the burden of responsibility upon the public at large with a clearer conscience.

The facts speak for themselves. When Clark had taken Kaskaskia, he sent this priest, Father Pierre Gibault, to Vincennes, to sound the French-Canadian population there, and possibly (on this detail there is disagreement) to prepare the ground for a future American advance upon Vincennes. What Gibault did was to assemble his parishioners in that old church which has witnessed so much history, to urge them to swear allegiance to the Americans, and, proceeding to the nearby Fort under the outward

leadership of a West Indian named Laffont, to lower the practically unguarded Cross of Saint George there, raising instead the standard of the "Rebels". Then he returned to Kaskaskia, and told Clark, "no less to his astonishment than to his gratification", as even the decidedly pro-Gibault Judge Law is compelled to admit, what he had done. Clark could not leave that flag unguarded; he had to despatch at once Captain Helm to Post Vincennes, with the assurance that he would rush a detachment of troops after him. The detachment was never sent; Helm remained there, almost alone, guarding a flag which could not be lowered now, but which had practically no defenders. What was ultimately bound to happen, happened; the British heard soon enough of the lowering of their Colors by a bunch of Canadian civilians at Fort Vincennes, and rushed to the scene General Henry Hamilton with 80 Britishers and 400 Indians. Helm, practically without helpers (which incidentally proves how deep Father Gibault's "Americanization of the Vincennes population" had been), bluffed a sort of defense: his letter to Clark, coolly announcing the closing-in of the British on the Fort—a letter which re-appeared in Canada, although the messenger by whom it had

been despatched was killed—makes us bow our heads in reverence. I grant that there may have been exaggeration in this as in most other military reports of the period; thus perhaps we are not to take too literally the description of the heroic Helm shutting the gates upon Hamilton's approach, and shouting that the defending garrison would not open unless they all knew that the conditions of surrender would be honorable—by this unprecedented show of nerve obtaining for "the defenders", consisting solely of himself, the honors of war! The fact is that these early Americans were far more fond of their forthcoming Country than of veracity: however, it is easy for us, sitting quietly in a rich Land which they made as much with their fibs as with their pluck, to pass judgment upon their ethics. To be truly ethical, we ought to resign their inheritance first.

However, no matter what reliance we can put upon the Helm episode, Father Gibault acted as a fool in trying to play the hero in British Vincennes instead of sticking to his spiritual duties; Clark's final report, coming after the first one wherein he had assumed responsibility for the Vincennes *coup* which miscarried, leaves no doubt as to the lack of foresight—at

least—of a Father Gibault WHO WAS LATER MADE THE RECIPIENT OF THE PUBLIC THANKS OF VIRGINIA, instead of Vigo, who fortunately appeared on the scene not long afterwards, just in time to save the day. All in all, Hamilton was bound to sit pretty tight in Vincennes now; and Clark fully realized it.

The youthful Colonel from Virginia, although from August 1, 1778, to January 29, 1779—when the intrepid Vigo succeeded in running through the virtual blockade—he had heard nothing from Vincennes, could easily guess. And he felt that unless he could strike a death blow at Hamilton now, it would be the beginning of the end for the American "rebels". This is the way he later summed it up:

> . . . "We now viewed ourselves in a very critical situation. We knew that Governor Hamilton in the spring would be at the head of such a force that nothing in this quarter could withstand his arms—that Kentucky must immediately fall—and well if the desolation ended there. We saw but one alternative, which was to attack the enemy in their quarters."

Yet this desperate resolve of attacking a well-armed enemy in its easily defendable quarters

was dependent upon three elementary conditions, ALL OF WHICH VIGO WAS ABLE TO MEET, with a malleability which finds hardly any parallel in history:

1. Clark must know the exact status of the Vincennes garrison: men, terrain, supplies, reinforcements in sight. And it was Vigo who succeeded in obtaining and conveying full information thereupon;

2. Clark must win over to America the civil population of Vincennes, now skeptical after the Helm episode, and in the meantime fully shown by General Hamilton the folly of its ways and brought again to British allegiance. Vigo managed tactfully to correct the Gibault blunder and to prepare the town for a definitive American victory;

3. Clark must have plenty of cash to arm an adequate expedition—and he had only a little semi-worthless Virginia paper. Vigo turned over his entire fortune to Clark, and the small army was forthwith assembled and sent.

No wonder the latest among the real historians of the conquest of the Midwest, Temple Bodley, thus extols our hero in his *"George Rogers Clark, His Life and Public Services"*:

> "Of the many true friends General Clark made among the Creoles of the Illinois towns and Vincennes, none was more loyal to him, or was a worthier man, than Francis Vigo."

Let us see how his "loyalty and worthiness" saved the day.

* * *

Clark, at Kaskaskia, was helpless until he knew what was going on at Vincennes, over two hundred miles away through a muddy wilderness infested by those scalping Indians of General Hamilton whose prowess had brought upon that stern fighter the nickname of "Hair-Buyer". No news had leaked through since August 1st; winter with its terrors was already upon them; and spring was bound to re-open the line of supply between British Vincennes and British Detroit. Vigo, at this time already a prosperous merchant who could not with impunity forego his interests, and an Italian to whom the future of this Franco-Anglo-Hispano-American continent might have seemed immaterial, left everything, and, with no remuneration whatsoever, started upon his career as a gentleman-spy. He took with him a single servant, and made for Vincennes.

His one chance to accomplish his mission de-

pended upon the following succession of events: —He must be taken prisoner—prevail upon his savage captors not to scalp him—appear before Hamilton—manage to avoid not only imprisonment or execution, but even expulsion —linger on in Vincennes, seeing everything in the Fort and everybody in the settlement—then make good his escape. Not an easy program; but one which he followed according to plans and schedule.

The story of Vigo's report and of Clark's consequent decision to strike is summed up naïvely in one long-winded sentence in Captain Bowman's Journal:

> "M. Vigo, a Spanish subject who had been at Post St. Vincents on his lawful business arrived and gave us intelligence that Governor Hamilton with 30 regulars and 50 volunteers and about 400 Indians had arrived in November and taken that Post with Captain Helms and disarmed the settlers and inhabitants on which Governor Clark called a Council of his Officers and it was concluded to go and attack Governor Hamilton at Saint Vincents for fear if it was let alone till Spring that he with all the force he could bring would cut us all off."

How was Vigo's mission accomplished? This

being just the sort of job to which our resourceful, tactful, and retiring Piedmontese would love to apply intensely and unstintedly his mind and heart, I shall ask my readers to follow his progress step by step. For the *real* Vigo should not be painted by an understanding biographer in scarlet and royal purple, but in half-outlined pastel shades. His *modus operandi* would never make good newspaper copy; but it was of the type that builds Nations.

While crossing the River Embarras, Vigo was seen and seized by a party of Indians; he must have avoided the scalping knife either by showing his powerful Indian connections, or by explaining that his scalp had no market value: he was not one of those Americans whose hair Hamilton purchased! Brought into the Fort and questioned by the General himself, Vigo initiated then and there the long, deft duel with the Britisher that was to end with Hamilton's defeat. The "Spanish Merchant" had been found roaming, at a time of the year unfit for innocent travel, and without either merchandise or "money"—that is, goods normally used for barter with the Indians. But while appearances were against him, it could not be proven that he had come from Kaskaskia, even less as the re-

sult of an understanding with Clark; he was a neutral gentleman, a Spanish citizen of Saint Louis, a personal friend of His Excellency the Governor of Upper Louisiana, and a wealthy merchant enjoying a little vacation by the waters of the Wabash. All of which was technically true. They may look all they wanted for messages from Colonel Clark, who—as Vigo was willing to admit—happened to be also a friend of the Governor of Upper Louisiana; they would find none. (Tradition has it that he *ate* them—probably chewing them together with tobacco—when he was taken prisoner; the chances are that he was carrying at least a note from Clark to Father Gibault.) Let the British hold him in Vincennes, which, having no nearby settlements, was as good as an island, until they had satisfied themselves as to his identity and harmlessness; for if they killed him, or locked him up in a cell at the Fort, Saint Louis would soon hear of it, and Spain would know how to avenge him.

This interference of Spain over a prominent subject of hers was the last thing Hamilton desired. A distant officer must never create a *casus belli* in days of international tension, unless specifically instructed to do so. On the other

hand, Vigo had all the earmarks of a potential enemy, whose unconditional release appeared dangerous. Well, had he not laid so much stress on the fact that he was an honorable Gentleman? Let him give his word of honor that he would "do no act injurious to British interests for the entire duration of the War". Vigo, realizing that if he agreed to that, either his mission or his honor would be lost, refused to subscribe to those terms. But he suggested an arrangement, which was accepted, pending developments: he was ready to give his word of honor that he would not leave Post Vincennes for the Wilderness until some mutually satisfactory form of pledge had been worked out, meanwhile reporting every day at the Fort. Hamilton acquiesced.

It had been a master stroke on Vigo's part. He needed to approach the population of the Post; and here he was, living among them. And he must know the status of the Fort; his daily visits there, faithfully reporting as agreed, gave him the most ideal opportunity to find out. Judge John Law, who was a member of Congress from 1861 to 1865, and who both in Indiana and in Washington never ceased to rave about the unfairness with which our Piedmon-

tese patriot was treated, thus described the usefulness of his late friend Vigo in this connection:

> "On his frequent visits to the Fort, his acute and discerning mind, aided by THE MOST POWERFUL MEMORY I EVER KNEW (*the capitals are mine*), enabled him to ascertain the state of the garrison, its numerical force, means of defense, position, in fine all the matter necessary to make an accurate report, as soon as liberated."

What George Rogers Clark thought of Vigo's skill in securing data and of his ability in remembering it, appears from his own narrative of the taking of Vincennes:

> . . . "But on the 29th of January, 1779, in the height of the hurry, a 'Spanish Merchant' who had been at Post Vincennes, arrived, and gave us the following intelligence:—That Mr. Hamilton had weakened himself by sending his Indians against the frontiers and to block up the Ohio; that he had not more than eighty men in garrison, three pieces of cannon, and some swivels mounted; that the hostile Indians were to meet at Post Vincennes in the spring, drive us out of the Illinois, and attack the Kentucky settlements in a body, joined by their Southern friends; that the troops under Hamilton were repair-

> ing the Fort, and expected a re-inforcement from Detroit in the spring; that he did not believe they were under much apprehension of a visit, and believed that if we could get there undiscovered, we might take the place. In short, we got every information from this Gentleman that we could wish for; as he had had good opportunities and had taken great pains to inform himself, with a design to give intelligence."

The "Gentleman" Vigo—I like Clark's word in this connection, showing how different Vigo was from a mercenary spy, who is often used but never honored—had done a marvelous job as an investigator and would-be reporter; Clark was indeed fortunate to have found on his path that *rara avis* hunted so laboriously by all military leaders, an able and brave man protected by a foreign citizenship who will outdo in skill and devotion what a compatriot of said military leader might have done, had it only been feasible to use him.

Yet while this achievement of Vigo at Vincennes—his survey of all means at the disposal of General Hamilton—has been granted some attention by historians, little or no credit has been given to Vigo for the other undertaking to which he contemporaneously applied his nimble

wits: the difficult work of winning back the repentant and disillusioned population of Post Vincennes, which had been led to lower the British flag only to find itself British again. This was probably the masterpiece of Vigo's diplomatic maneuvering, and must be studied in the right psychological and racial setting—which can at last be accomplished with the support of new evidence.

Let us be logical. Why was Vincennes always so strong for Vigo, whenever Vigo needed support? "Because its priest, Father Gibault, so desired", answers the chorus of devotees of the French Jesuit; people who, from the day when certain pseudo-historical novels were written, have appeared unable to think of the conquest of the Midwest except in romantic terms of Madame Godare's "Western Stars and Stripes", wicked British soldiers versus godlike Americans, priests so world-wise as to set right all political problems, and so on. The real answer is quite different, and is contained in another question, which reverses the terms of the first: *Why was Vigo always so strong for Vincennes?* Why did he sacrifice in her favor the company of so many Mississippi Valley Creoles, who had helped him, loved him, made him?

Why did Vincennes succeed in holding him for more than half a century? Does it not seem strange that the roaming fur merchant should have forsaken that capital of "Upper Louisiana" which, irrespective of changes of allegiance, was becoming more and more the fur metropolis of the heart of the Continent, and, when finally anchored by matrimony as well as by advancing age, and ready to build for himself a "palace" which Governor Harrison shunned as too elegant for his own residence, should have preferred provincial, sleepy Vincennes so irreparably doomed to Saint Louis and New Orleans which had meanwhile become cities important and ambitious?

The answer is simple: Vigo felt more at home, more happily surrounded by friends who finally understood him, at Vincennes than anywhere else. And this fact, which I shall proceed to explain not so much with documents, which can offer only indirect proof, as by logic, throws more light than anything else on his proven ability to re-Americanize them.

No, it was *not* Gibault who did that job—far from it! On that, I shall throw the full weight of documentary evidence, since the destruction of an old myth is at stake: evidence

which is, in my estimation, conclusive. How *could* he have received without blushing the public thanks of the Government of Virginia, the man who had not been ashamed to write, from American territory, this kind of a letter to his own Bishop:

> . . . "As to my being or having been favorable to the American Republic, you only have to re-read my first letter in which I give you an account of our capture (*that is, of the taking of Vincennes by the Virginians under Colonel Clark*), and my last letter in which I sent you a certificate of my conduct at Post Vincennes, in the capture of which it was said I had interested myself, and you will see that not only I did not meddle with anything, but on the contrary I always longed, and still long every day, for the happy rule of the British." ("J'AY TOUJOURS REGRETTE, ET REGRETTE ENCORE TOUS LES JOURS, LES DOUCEURS DU GOUVERNEMENT BRITANNIQUE.")

The letter, addressed to Bishop Jean François, is dated May 22, 1788, and can still be consulted in the Archiepiscopal Archives in Quebec. It fits perfectly with other anti-American utterances of this meddling and unholy "benefactor of the United States", who elsewhere

describes the Illinois settlers after the American conquest as "more miserable than they have ever been, having been ruined and worn out by the Virginians, who left them without chiefs, without troops, and without justice", and makes his superiors cognizant of his "repugnance against serving in Republican America."

To all of which the defenders of Father Gibault reply: "These documents are genuine enough, but they date, not from 1778-79 when the priest was confronted with the responsibility of 'Americanizing' his flock, but from 1782 to 1788, when he had become disillusioned as to America's ability to run the Mississippi country." All right then, will the testimony of a prominent witness, Dr. Jean Baptiste Laffont, dated as early as 1778 and reproduced in facsimile in Alvord's admirable "Kaskaskia Records", prove more persuasive? He wrote as follows to George Rogers Clark:

> . . . "Monsieur Gibeaut (*sic*) . . . dans tous les afferre civilles tant avec les francois qu' avec les Sauvages, il ne s'est mêlé de rien . . . cela étant contre son caractère." . . .

True, Laffont tried to take the glory of Vincennes' "Americanization" on himself instead, at least for the earlier effort; but the invaluable

Quebec Archiepiscopal Archives have yielded Gibault's own confirmation of the Laffont version:—

> "As concerns the inhabitants of Post Vincennes, whom I am accused by the Canadians to have led into treason, it may be that the inhabitants themselves have put all the responsibility on me in order to keep out of trouble with Governor Henry Amilton (*sic*); or it may be that he himself and the officers, in order to forgive a population so ignorant, took the pretext that it could have been led astray only by me, and thus made the blame fall upon my shoulders. The truth is that not having been at Post Vincennes for a long time and finding a favorable occasion to go there with Mr. Laffont who was well escorted, I profited thereby in order to perform my duties. If I had meddled in an affair of this importance, definite proof of it would have been found somewhere, and better evidence would have been shown than 'it is said', 'we have heard', and the like."

It is Gibault himself, therefore, who confirms to his Bishop what Laffont was reporting to Colonel Clark, namely the fact that he, Gibault, did *not* play that decisive persuasive rôle—and I shall presently show how much more decisive that rôle was, than a romantic and chauvinistic

version of the Vincennes campaign has hitherto made it appear!

I grant that Gibault was writing to the supposedly anti-American Bishop of Quebec. He might have been justified for putting the soft pedal on his share of the Vincennes events of 1778-79; not for basically altering facts. To whom was he lying, to his ecclesiastical or to his political authorities? The dilemma is clear: if he lied to the Commonwealth of Virginia, and he really acted in the anti-American way described in the above letters, then he was a traitor to his Country; if he lied to his superiors, and for a number of years kept on fooling them on the character of his work in distant parishes where a Bishop had no way of verifying his priest's statements, then he was a traitor to his Faith. In either case, the man who usurped a large share of Vigo's glory was, let me repeat it, a liar and a traitor.

I say this without bitterness, but with the indignation of one who, facts in hand, cannot leave unchallenged the endless pro-Gibault statements which have acted, directly or indirectly, to Vigo's detriment, culminating in this plaintive one of Cauthorn *(History of the City of Vincennes)*: "Why did Judge Law prefer the

sympathetic and sociable, yet unlettered Sardinian, to the magnetic, eloquent, and learned Arcadian?"—Readers of this biography by this time ought to know *why,* without having to follow Cauthorn's broad hint that Judge Law expected money for his praise. Incidentally, Judge Law had never said that he "preferred" Vigo to Gibault: he had only mentioned them in the same breath—which I suppose is quite irreverent, since Gibault was nothing less than an "Arcadian", and Vigo a mere Sardinian. . . .

It is illuminating to see that Professor Alvord, fairest of modern critics, deals gently with Gibault when discussing his general merits ("he was ready to use his influence with the people, but preferred to throw the responsibility on another, so that if the issue should be different from what was anticipated, he would still be able to use the argument [of his neutrality] to the British authorities"); but waxes eloquent on his unfairness to Vigo:

> "Ever since Judge John Law wrote in his *Colonial History of Vincennes* that to Father Gibault 'next to Clark and Vigo the United States are more indebted for the accession of the States comprised in what was the original Northwest Territory than to any other man,' the honor of securing the submission of Vin-

> cennes has been unanimously assigned to the parish priest, while his associate and the part he took in the enterprise have been almost forgotten; and no attempt has ever been made to estimate the value of his services."

With Gibault out of the way, such "estimation" can now be attempted, even though we must rely upon a minimum of documentation and a maximum of common sense.

In the first place, let us proceed by exclusion. If Vigo did not "Americanize" Vincennes, who did it? There came no influential people—men of education, or means, or experience—to the Vincennes of that day, except Father Gibault and Vigo (and, of course, a few British officers, who could hardly be accused of the "Americanization" of the population of their Post!). Laffont had already returned to Kaskaskia as early as August 7, 1778, when the population of Vincennes had not yet been brought down to earth by the return of the British, under Hamilton. Besides Vigo, the only other visitors from the American settlements in the great Valley whom Vincennes could have seen until Colonel Clark's arrival, might have been a Kaskaskia lad of 19 named Louis Séguin (supposedly accompanied by his helper, a Creole nicknamed

"Jojong"), who *fifty-five* years later asked the United States to recompense him for arriving at Vincennes a few days before Clark and "advising the population to be quiet and tranquil." Clark never mentions them. However, he specifies that he sent "horsemen ahead of him", who could not get through owing to floods. Were those Séguin and "Jojong"? Even if this is the case, and they did "get through", they were men of no account, with no possible following; and Séguin's most advanced claim was that he had asked the population to be "tranquil"—*i.e.,* taking no sides between Clark and Hamilton—*not* rebellious against their British masters.

Then there is the consensus of opinion among the people of Vincennes, that Vigo was their one, great, first link to their new Country. How beloved he was by them! How he loved them in turn! They named their main street after him, and he acted as the godfather of half the town. They sent him as a delegate to the first Territorial Convention, and he held open house for them every Fourth of July, treating to a gargantuan free dinner any citizen of Vincennes who either needed or simply desired one on that day. They had the best County of Southern

Indiana named after him, when even in the National Capital everybody had forgotten that there ever existed a Francis Vigo; and he gave to the official home of that County an eternal voice of bronze.

What sort of people were those Vincennians, anyway? French-speaking woodsmen, of course; but apparently different from the other "Frenchmen" in the Wilderness. It was upon reading Volney, the celebrated Volney of the *Causeries du Lundi,* that I became curious about the "Kultur" of those fellow-townsmen-to-be of my friend Vigo, and began an investigation which grew more and more interesting as I proceeded. Volney had been visiting various French settlements in the West of his day, fully describing Gallipolis. From there he proceeded to Vincennes. For one who paid so brief a visit to those colonies, this remark seemed arresting: *"En étudiant les moeurs des colons de Gallipolis et du Post-Vincennes, j'ai trouvé des différences rémarquables à beaucoup d'égards."* I decided to find out *what,* and, above all, *why.*

Now, Gallipolis had been settled by French families coming from France direct; it was natural that their traits should differ from those

of all others. But even the other "French" colonists were not all alike. There seemed to be three types of French-speaking settlements in the West of that day, corresponding to three types of settlers: First, the Creoles from Louisiana, origin unknown (at least officially!), an adventurous and undisciplined lot, at the same time more Parisian and more Caribbean than the others; Second, the rank and file of French Canadians, most of them wretchedly poor, who for some reason or other had left their civilized Quebec world and were camping sordidly wherever two rivers met or a few soldiers might repel some minor Indian raids—Sainte Généviève, Cahokia, Prairie du Rocher, Saint Philippe, even Kaskaskia which tried to pass as fastidious and discriminating but could not keep it up for long; and, Third, that enduring aristocrat among wilderness settlements, Vincennes. Not that the Vincennians were rich: but Aristocracy has nothing to do with Plutocracy; and Canadians knew, and still know, the difference. Vincennes immediately became and steadily remained a great religious center; Vincennes had the best appointed and the best garrisoned fort; Vincennes had a population less transitory than that of any of the other Posts; Vincennes had

that indescribable asset which some new nations affect not to understand, but which represents a magic force—she had TRADITION. The fact is, she had been founded by a "Carignan" officer, and she had been settled by "Carignan" soldiers.

If this does not mean much to my American friends, it is because they usually know so little about the culture of their Canadian neighbors. I consider it far from out of place to outline briefly the little-known American epic represented by this most unique among military units, as it has a bearing upon the activities of Vigo.

Only persons who have lived some time among French Canadians can appreciate the magic significance of the name of CARIGNAN. To be a *Mayflower* descendant in New England is nothing to being a "Carignan" descendant in New France. And it must be avowed that the glamour and the *esprit de corps* of this most exceptional of regiments—altogether too little known in that Italy where it was first recruited —contributed to the writing of so colorful a historical page that it would shine with brilliant light in the chronicles of a country far older and on closer terms with history than Canada is or has been.

> "Few regiments had a more singular experience: in 1664 it fought the Turks, in 1665 the Mohawk Indians, in 1666 it was beating swords into plowshares on the banks of the River Saint Lawrence! The officers of the Carignan Regiment gave New France the nucleus of an Aristocracy."

Thus Colby, in his "Canadian types of the Old Regime." But his is far from being an isolated statement. Every Canadian schoolboy is taught about the Carignan Regiment; only, he does not know where Carignan is, does not realize that the first contingent of one thousand "Carignan" soldiers was entirely Italian, and certainly never dreams that the founder of this crack regiment, Prince Tommaso Francesco di Carignano, is an ancestor of the present King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III of Savoy-Carignano. Of such little connections are international amities often made; more is the pity that it should not have been broadcast long ago by some loyal subject of the Savoy-Carignanos. Perhaps some Italian did see it, but Canada, "colonial" Canada, seemed to his European eye too remote, too provincial to spur him on to further research. May this new link, however feebly tying these "de Carignan" pioneers with a larger Commonwealth on the same Continent, act

as a goad, until the history of this extraordinary military unit and of its descendants in Canada and even in the United States shall appear in its full radiance. For it is not only a record of victories in the battlefields of two worlds: the "Régiment de Carignan" can truly appropriate the glorious motto: FIRST IN PEACE—FIRST IN WAR.

When Louis XIV decided, in the course of Italian campaigns which covered Italy with blood and only profited France, to accept Prince Carignano's offer of an Italian regiment strictly *hors ligne* from his own very military Piedmont, he was only following wise national precedent: every Frenchman should remember that in the precise hierarchy of the French Army, four appeared as the basic regiments of the Realm, deriving their names from the regions where they had been recruited: *Piémont,* dating from 1560, Picardie (1567), Champagne (1580), and Navarre (1589); all other French units had to yield to them the right of way in peace as in war. As to the Carignan Regiment—officially Number 35, but always known as "Carignan"—its Gallification was soon accomplished by a host of French subaltern officers; even though here and there irrepressible Italy peeps

through even in that quarter, for instance through the exploits of one of its Ensigns, Jean de Brandis, *"originaire de Turin"*. "De Brandis" sounds indeed as a *nom de bataille* for an Italian of an age when "brando", a now obsolete word meaning "sword", was one of the most popular terms in the orgy of pseudo-heroic versifying being indulged in: but what is one *nom de bataille* when it is realized that hardly any of the one thousand soldiers who arrived in Canada in 1665 had failed to take on a *nom de bataille,* naturally French? The French language press of Canada, incensed because Italy claims at last the glory of her children sent to fight and colonize for others, thunders out: "Show us their Italian family names!" We can only reply in the words of two ultra-patriotic French Canadian scholars, Roy and Malchelosse, that the names of "Carignan" soldiers may be classed into six categories: (1) the real family names—"LE PETIT NOMBRE"—(and yet we find among those few a Conty, a Matta, a Germaneau, a Montagny); (2) those who took the names of provinces; (3) those who took the names of cities; (4) those who adopted *"noms qui indiquaient l'origine provinciale"*, such as Le Breton, Le Valon; (5)

those *"qui portaient noms de choses, comme La Chapelle, Deslauriers";* finally, (6) *"les noms caractérisant certains soldats: Bon Courage, Brise-tout,* etc."—Will the reader kindly tell me how a poor countryman of Prince Carignano can rescue anything Italian in this wholesale denaturalization, considering the fact that THE ORIGINAL LISTS HAVE SOMEHOW DISAPPEARED FROM THE ARCHIVES IN PARIS?

In any case, the following appropriate anecdote seems worth relating. A friend of mine from Piedmont, who had gone hunting into the Quebec woods, overheard his French Canadian guides, engaged in ribald talk, mention a word which every Piedmontese knows but cannot repeat in polite society. Investigation showed that the ancestors of those guides were early Canadian soldiers, and that the word was known to all, although meaningless in France. Let the French press of Montreal explain that!

An "accident" of trans-oceanic duplication? No, I can disprove that theory; other unquestionably Italian (Piedmontese) words have crept into Old Canadian; and, happily, these can appear in print. Colonel Crawford Lindsay, the Quebec bi-linguist who translated into

English Malhiot's Journal (1804), is puzzled by the words *bon bestia, pauvres bestias* which appear in said Journal. "Must be a local word. Not one of the dictionaries (including those of Breton and Norman Patois) has it." No: it is simply Italian for *good devil, poor devils.* Similarly Lindsay's cryptic *peu de fiate* was a Canadian-Italian expression meaning *poco fiato,* i.e., "little endurance"; soldiers would be likely to use it often. (Cfr. Wisconsin Historical Collections, vol. XIX, p. 199 *et passim.*) One might continue it, but this is no philological treatise. Let us return to the non-linguistic exploits of those "Carignans".

Peace having come to Italy—at last!—in 1659, the Carignan Regiment was used first in the Low Countries, then against the Turks, saving from Islamization the Western World by fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Imperial troops, which, by the way, were commanded by another Italian, the immortal Montecuccoli. But the French settlers in Canada—a puny, despairing handful of people, five hundred families all told, almost crushed by the unfriendly combination of distance, Indians, and climate—begged Louis XIV to send them strong military support; something real, that would terrify the

unfriendly Iroquois. And the "Carignans" were sent.

The descriptions of their arrival (the best of them by the able pen of Mère Marie de l'Incarnation) not only exhibit great picturesqueness, but provide a liberal education in character, gameness, military spirit. Those downcast "habitans" of Quebec were indeed seeing a new spectacle. Long-suffering and brave they had always been; but this military unit represented more than just courage and force: it brought that subtle spirit of cohesion, self-reliance, constructiveness, pride, and hierarchy through which a body of troops has sometimes achieved the miracle of re-vitalizing a poor or troubled colony.

The Carignan Regiment enjoyed the distinction of being the only French regiment whose soldiers wore a regular uniform (which was a combination of brown and gray for service in the Canadian woods); until then, only the crossing *"bandolière et écharpe"* distinguished soldier from civilian in France. It was armed better than any French regiment was or had been: *"ce fut le prémier Régiment Français dont chaque soldat était armé avec un fusil à platine, devançant les troupes de la mère-patrie*

qui ne reçurent d'abord que quatre fusiliers par compagnie." Four riflemen for a company consisting of fifty soldiers had been very limited armament indeed, although among the other forty-six were always several *lanspezzades* (French corruption for the Italian *lance spezzate*—broken lances!), veterans known for their bravery. Furthermore, the "Régiment de Carignan" is, to this day, the sole regiment which Canada's European masters transferred *in toto* to that Colony, not leaving behind even a skeleton organization, replacement unit, "home" barracks, or any other form of Old World connection. It made Canada feel of age.

Landing in 1665, the seasoned Carignan fighters disposed so quickly of their new enemy, that on the following year they were ready to go back to Europe. But at that time Louis XIV and Colbert decided that France must build up in a hurry the population of Canada; what better material than these hardy and war-tested Alpine folk, equally proverbial for their aptness in creating life in days of peace as for extinguishing it in days of war? If these "Carignans" wanted to remain in the New World as colonists, they would be given land in close proximity to the forts built by the Regiment in

Canada, especially the Fort de Chambly—which according to the description of my friend Dr. Margotti, former Italian Consul General in Montreal, "still bears undisturbed the Carignan arms carved in the place of honor above its main gate". But they must, of course, marry French girls. About four hundred soldiers and most of the officers elected to remain in Canada; the discrepancy between the proportion of soldiers and that of officers appears natural when we consider that practically every officer was a Frenchman, while a number of the soldiers must have been Italian. How many? It is hard to estimate; regimental losses had been heavy (Roy and Malchelosse figure them at 250 men killed in Indian warfare or dead of disease since leaving France); and of course none of the replacements would be from Italy, as the link with Piedmont would henceforth be not one of blood but merely one of memories, prestige, pride. So, let us not exaggerate: the *personal* Italian connection was scant; the *traditional,* however, unquestionable. When Napoleon again drained Piedmont of its best human material to raise the glory of France, the Italians were hailed beyond the Alps as old friends: their mentality, their capabilities were known to every French military leader.

A large proportion of demobilized Carignan fighters settled very close to Chambly, so that a "Chambly origin" in a French Canadian family carries with it a presumption of the coveted Carignan descent. Thus a number of *Seigneuries* were established; a kind of feudal system prevailing, which also made provision for the maintenance of military rank in case Indian raids made sudden recalls to the near-by Fort imperative. Meanwhile, Colbert was rushing after these rugged warrior-colonists one shipload after another of French wives-to-be, most of them "Filles du Roi" or inmates of public institutions. The colonization of New France was assured.

The Colony never ceased to consider the descendants of Carignan veterans, and even the other French soldiers who had almost simultaneously landed at Quebec from the West Indies (and whose descendants proceeded to "annex" their ancestors to the glorious regiment!) as the best *pépinière* of Canadian citizenship. And whenever an important expedition was planned through the Midwest wilderness, the military responsibility was put in charge of a "de Carignan" descendant; and the colonists to be left in the settlements were, if not the

offspring of original "Carignans", at least ex-soldiers made at their school—a school of conservatism, resourcefulness, bravery, unmercenariness, and obedience. On such qualities Vincennes rose at once, and without flashiness has since maintained her prestige and her happy, uneventful life; for such qualities Vigo loved her from the start, naturally awakening a corresponding affection in her inhabitants: the unpolished but substantial Piedmontese soldier from Mondoví had found, if not actually descendants of soldiers from Carignan (a town, by the way, only about thirty miles away from Mondoví) at least people raised at the "Carignan" school. He and they "spoke the same language"; apart from all other arguments, it would be easier for a Vigo, who was *one of them* (down to that mixture of illiteracy and common sense which is a decisive card with the lowly), than for the schooled and scheming Father Gibault to make them look at America in the right light.

And the Carignan connection with Vincennes is now fully established. It had always been a tradition at the Post. Both the old historians of Vincennes, Bishop Bruté and Judge Law, while all wrong upon the identity of its founder, re-

inforce with their authority the said Carignan tradition. Yet only very recently M. Roy, ablest hunter of Canadian genealogies (see his *Sieur de Vincennes identified*) has given us definite certainty by proving that the real founder of Vincennes was François Bissot, nephew and godchild of François Margane, first "Sieur de Vinsene", from whom he took the title to the *Seigneurie* after which Vincennes, Indiana, was named. And he was a direct-line descendant from brave fighters of the "Régiment de Carignan"; the list of soldiers who landed in Quebec in 1665 gives one Séraphin Margane[1], who fought, was demobilized, married, obtained an estate near Chambly on October 29, 1672, and raised there eleven children: the third was François, whose nephew, godchild, protégé, and finally heir to the Seigneury of Vinsene was the François Bissot who founded Vincennes (originally named Vinsene), Indiana. This François Bissot was born in Montreal, June 17, 1700, and died burned at the stake by Chickasaw Indians near Fulton, Lee County, Mississippi, on March 25, 1736. And while

[1]This is surely the *"Morgan"* mentioned by Judge Law in connection with early Vincennes days. When we bear in mind that the Judge's chief source was the oral tradition of the Vincennes settlers, we realize how much light can be shed on history by evidence other than documentary!

we cannot with the same accuracy follow all the family trees of the more humble folk who followed François Bissot de Vinsene to that distant Post, the often-repeated statement that they had come from Chambly—the first Fort of the Carignan Regiment in Canada and the chief home of its demobilized warriors—automatically label their descendants as prospective friends of Vigo. Our Piedmontese found here at last somebody who was looking UP at his European homeland—not DOWN on it!

Volney himself, a visitor all the more worthy of attention in that he was one of the most educated, and, in this matter, totally unbiased, made this significant remark after his Vincennes journey, *undertaken as late as 1796:*

> "Le langage de ces Français . . . est mêlé de beaucoup de termes et de locutions de soldat . . . Le Régiment de Carignan a servi de souche au Canada."

Here and there, an Italian who studies those early Vincennians is even jolted by probably subconscious reminiscences of the distant homeland of these more or less diluted "Carignans". Three miles from the town, where the prairie turned into forest, Volney—a Frenchman—tells us he found a stream called *Ombra,* which

is Italian for "Shade". The measure of length in the whole region was the *"brasse"* ("arm") equal to the old Piedmontese *"brasso"* and NOT to .5318 English feet, as in France. Two of the most prominent families in the Post are alternately referred to in parish records as *Campo* and *Campeau, Tardivo* and *Tardiveau;* and even granting that the Italian form may be the result of poor spelling, frequent at the time, will not the reader recall that "Campo" and "Tardivo" are words with a definite significance in Italian ("Field" and "The Slow One"), while they have none in French? *Filibert* or *Philibert* is even more tell-tale; it happens to be the favorite Christian name of most members of the princely Carignan family, and would be likely to prove popular in "de Carignan" circles, whenever a nickname or *nom de bataille* was desired (in Prairie du Rocher, two families of veterans actually took the family name of *Carignan)*; whereas in France it is very rarely found. And how about the *Pancrass* family? In real French, the name "Pancrass" does not exist; whereas it is good Piedmontese dialect corresponding to the Italian *Pancrazi,* a very common name in Italy; and remember that these rude soldiers were no philologists inter-

ested in the "pure Italian from Tuscany"! More obviously Italian is the origin of the Pierre *Leonardy,* Lieutenant in charge of the Vincennes garrison, who had died there on May 24, 1753. The Leonardi family is still prominent in Central Piedmont, near Carignano and Mondoví.

I beg the reader not to misunderstand me. I am not trying to plant over Vincennes the Italian flag (which flag, by the way, bears in its center the very arms brought to Canada by the Carignan Regiment) ; I am probing, mercilessly perhaps but logically, into the mentality of the early settlers of Vincennes, in an endeavor to reconstruct Vigo's work in winning their hearts and minds. Is it unfair to assume that a good entering wedge would be the stories he could tell about that Carignan region from which they were either physically or spiritually descended? Such traditional subjects are always fraught with keen interest among more primitive people, who plan less about their future, and wonder more about their past, than we do. Then there was the other eternal attraction, the yarns about a soldier's life of adventure and of adventures! Women and children would then—as they always do—fall for it; and the men of

the Post, now leading a hand-to-mouth existence tending cattle, tilling a few precarious patches of land, and bartering in a minor way with the Indians, would feel their dormant soldier blood surge again in their veins, remembering what fighting stock they sprang from, and realizing more acutely the shame of their being now but a flock of sheep in the hands of red-coated shepherds alien in race, speech, and ideals. "The Americans were different: they were English, French, Dutch; they were Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. Under the standard of rebellion raised by Virginia there was room for every blood and creed; and since France had totally abandoned these colonists, they must now choose the lesser of the two evils: becoming a tool in the hands of the alien British, or helping build a composite Country under the flag of the revolting colonies."

His hearers were, according to all accounts, a cheerful but unemotional, hospitable, unambitious, conservative, unbelievably obstinate, religious but not bigoted, politically apathetic group of French-speaking people, most unGallic in its stodginess; illiteracy was rampant among them, and honesty universal. In some ways they were "typical French Canadians",

and in other ways they were not. After the Clark victory, Americans were shocked to hear that one of the first acts the Vincennes civil population performed, once they had thanked their liberator, was that of demanding a Civil Governor to rule them. "These new Americans ought to have proceeded to elect their own officials instead", Volney was indignantly told. Well, perhaps: we shall not discuss the blessings of the ballot. The point is that these grandchildren of good soldiers, whether Piedmontese, French, or Canadian, were conceiving life in that form of hierarchy which is so distasteful to the average American, who can stand the most abominable city administration as long as he is sure he is not being "held down by Dictators"; he may be atrociously governed, but must be able to say with pride, "This atrocity is of my own free making. Behold my own self-begotten child: isn't he a sweet monster!" But Post Vincennes was a sort of a distant colony, its population was in a way *the regiment* which held it, even though the hated Red Coats occupied the Fort: and when had it ever happened that the "Régiment de Carignan" elected its own Colonel by a vote of the soldiers?

These "soldiers"—let me repeat it—were

religious but not bigoted. The defenders of Father Gibault who say to themselves, "Who could have Americanized Vincennes, except its pastor?", fail to understand the very thing I have been trying to stress, namely that these were no ordinary run of French Canadians, who might conceivably obey with glee anything that a priest asks them to do, whether in the spiritual or in the temporal field; these had "de Carignan" blood in their veins, and as such would give their lives fighting the Infidel and the Heretic, but could not be made to confuse Church and State, Peter and Cæsar. If the glorious regiment had kept just one item in its mental kit when it crossed the Alps into France, it must have been the lesson which so many centuries of Catholicism have taught the sons of Italy: "Obey your priest fully when you are in his church; but do not let him stray *outside* of his church". Quebec had been shocked by the insufferance of clerical omnipotence exhibited by these "Carignans"; and Father Gibault, who in this religious field had no axe to grind and is therefore reliable, stated that the Vincennians were so ignorant in matters of piety that they resembled "the savages among whom they live". So little did they

bother with the externals of religion, that sometimes their priest could not say Mass because the only person who could assist at it was "an old European who was not always able to come". ("European": a Catholic who was neither a Frenchman nor a Spaniard; who could he be? Another Italian unaccounted for? In any case it could not be Vigo, who was then barely forty.) Far more convincing than a learned Jesuit always reading "Pontas, Lamet et Fromageau, Ste Meauve, les Conférences d'Anger, Collet, le dictionnaire des Conciles, et le dictionnaire théologique" (Gibault's letter to his Bishop), must have appeared, in the eyes of the non-intellectual Vincennes folk, the Prince of Fur traders, the expert on Indian lore and languages, the friend of the Spanish Governor, now in their midst and assuring them of the near-at-hand arrival of the Americans. This was no dreamer priest, who had made his parishioners offend Britain when they were still at her mercy, but a hard-boiled business man who backed his political prophecy with his own cash, assuring them that he would just as soon take the paper money of the Virginians as the French *piastres fortes* then holding sway irrespective of flags all over the Valley, and that they must do

the same if they wanted to be rid of the "Red Coats".

All the evidence, documentary as well as logical, reached by exclusion and by deduction, points therefore to Vigo as to the canny diplomat who prepared the *town* of Vincennes for America's rule, while he was daily strolling into the *fort* of Vincennes to say to General Hamilton: "Here I am". Soldiers came to know him well; that he was a "good mixer" appears evident; it is easy to see how he would soon learn so much. And now his double job was done: if he was to report to Clark he must go at once, as only a surprise winter attack might conquer Vincennes. What about the danger of *his* crossing that rough country in the dead of winter? That did not count with Vigo. In any case, it was less dangerous than being recognized and reported as Clark's agent by some stray *voyageur,* or *"apostate"* turned Indian. How did he manage to be allowed to leave?

Here again, earlier history has given another boost to Father Gibault, who is represented as "marching into the Fort, at the head of the entire civil population, after service on the Sabbath, informing General Hamilton that they would refuse all supplies to the garrison unless

Vigo was released". So stated Judge Law, in the Appendix to his "Colonial History of Vincennes"; and everybody followed suit.

Now this is simply grotesque. The heroic Gibault marching into the presence of General Hamilton, INFORMING him that they were about to starve him! How grossly absurd. The fact is that Gibault, never very brave, became utterly panicky in the presence of General Hamilton, a stern soldier who may have had his faults but who would have no patience with a spineless priest playing a double game all the time. General Clark tells us (and we must not forget that he was most friendly with Father Gibault, never suspecting him of double-dealing) that when Gibault was in Kaskaskia in 1778 and there was some fear of a surprise attack by the British, "the priest of all men was the most afraid of Mr. Hamilton". The *heroic Gibault,* supposed to be issuing ultimatums to the British General a few months later, had then become so hopelessly terrified that Colonel Clark, to avoid the town's demoralization, "found an excuse to send him for security to the Spanish bank"—that is, the Spanish side of the Mississippi, which was neutral territory! So said Clark himself; and English, in his *Con-*

quest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio, adds that "in that picture of terror the central figure was Father Gibault". Highly honored Father, I had been under the impression that FORTITUDE was one of the Four Cardinal Virtues. But then, I may be all wrong, since I also thought that they included JUSTICE, yet you took away from Vigo the "Public Thanks" of Virginia, usurping them yourself. . . .

But, to return to Judge Law, who started the ball rolling, in re-reading for the Nth time his basic *Colonial History of Vincennes* I have become aware of something which had hitherto always escaped me: his glorification of Father Gibault, followed by the special chapter entitled "Catholic Church", dates not from 1839, when the first edition of the book was printed, but from twenty years later, when, significantly enough, the author was preparing the campaign that sent him to Congress *in a territory containing the cradle of Midwest Catholicism;* and Vincennians never knew of Gibault's later disgrace. It may have been pure accident; Judge Law was an honest man, but then the ways of Democracy have ruined even finer people. At any rate, let me point out objectively that a

comparison between the two editions of his work shows that Gibault's name *does not even appear* in the 1839 version of Vigo's release by Hamilton, which is worded as follows:

> "Hamilton, in the meantime, embarrassed by his [Vigo's] detention, besieged by the French inhabitants of the town, by whom he was beloved, for his release; and finally threatened by them that, unless released, they would refuse all supplies to the garrison, yielded."

The "Appendix" written in 1858 with a pro-Gibault slant removes two important elements: General Hamilton's original embarrassment as to what he ought to do with the neutral "Spanish Merchant", and the fact that Vigo was "beloved by the inhabitants of the town", which was, as I have discussed to satiety, the master key to the whole situation. It adds, however, the bombastic *ultimatum* of Father Gibault to General Hamilton, which we may discard without further ado as one of Judge Law's regrettable after-thoughts, belonging in the same class with the 1858 statement that *Clark, Vigo, and Gibault* were the heroes of Vincennes, whereas in 1839 he had so qualified only *Clark and Vigo.*

Personally, I do not see why there should

have been any "threat of the inhabitants" to bring about Vigo's release; in the first place because Fort and Post were rather interdependent than the former at the mercy of the latter: one may have supplied more food, the other may have secured more powder, but neither one could be issuing ultimatums to the other with impunity; it came near happening once, later—as we shall see—but only in a situation involving the dilemma between life and death for the settlement, not merely the release of a visitor who was, after all, treated with every consideration. And then Hamilton had never meant to detain Vigo indefinitely: that would have been a *very* unfriendly act toward a man close to Governor de Leyba. He only wanted to make doubly sure that Vigo was not an American spy; and nobody in town knew him as such, while better informed outsiders were not likely to come into Vincennes for months, it being now January (1779). By that time it was all a matter of finding a pledge for Vigo to sign, which would be so worded as to save Hamilton's face and yet be satisfactory to Vigo. So, since Vigo appeared indeed to be a bona-fide Spaniard from Saint Louis, let him subscribe to this pledge:

> I HEREBY GIVE MY WORD OF HONOR AS A GENTLEMAN THAT I SHALL RETURN TO SAINT LOUIS WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING INJURIOUS TO BRITISH INTERESTS.

Vigo could sign this formula honorably, and he did—while his subtle mind must have run to the loophole which Hamilton was leaving inadvertently open.

The next day, Vigo, accompanied by two escorts, departed in a pirogue down the Wabash and the Ohio, then up the Mississippi, until Saint Louis was reached. He had not done one thing "injurious to British interests", and he had "returned to Saint Louis". Now his pledge, technically at least, was over! He did not even go home, nor report to his evidently most broadminded Barracks. With the very same pirogue he hastened to Kaskaskia, to call that American Post to arms.

Was Vigo's procedure in the face of his parole ethically correct? The matter is open to honest difference of opinion. Thus did Judge Law, in his earlier and more unbiased version (1839) of Vincennes happenings, view Vigo's procedure:

> . . . "Let others judge of this matter as they may; we who have lived to see the immense advantages of that conquest to our beloved Country, will teach our children and our children's children, who are to occupy our places when we are gone, to read and remember, among the earliest lessons of the history of that portion of our Country which is to be also their abiding place, that its conquest and subsequent attachment to the Union was as much owing to the councils and services of Vigo, as to the bravery and enterprise of Clark."

Thus, while there may have been, and still are, two ways of looking at the correctness of the Italian's deed, every patriotic American must look up to him with a grateful admiration directed to the clever mind of Vigo, if his deed was ethical; to the meritorious Americanism of Vigo, if his deed was questionable. As a specimen of uncannily resourceful humanity, or as a Maker of America, his earliest Vincennes exploits are exceptionally distinguished; and a public either World-wide or Nation-wide should make *amende honorable* by acclaiming them at last.

CHAPTER V

The Bloodless "Victory of Vincennes"

WHEN, on February 2, Vigo's pirogue landed him at Kaskaskia, Clark was both elated and downcast. Elated, because Vigo had proved a rich mine of information; downcast, because he was unable to act thereupon. To the utter dismay of the "Spanish Merchant", the Virginian, after listening in admiration to the full report of what had been accomplished by Vigo's two-fold mission, had to confess that he was not in a position to go.

That Clark's first feeling had been one of elation over the thorough way in which Vigo had outdone his instructions or at least his original program, by winning over not only the French Canadians of Vincennes but even the Indians encamped thereabouts, appears clearly from the detailed letter which the Colonel hastened to send to Governor Patrick Henry on the next day, February 3 (1779):

> "Yesterday I fortunately got every piece of intelligence that I could wish for, by a Spanish Gentleman that made his escape from Mr. Hamilton . . . The Grand Kite and his Nation living at Post St. Vincents[1] told Mr. Hamilton that he and his people were Big Knives [Virginians] and would not give their hands any more to the English. Ninety regulars in garrison at Vincennes and about fifty Tawaway Indians. They are very busy repairing the Fort, which will presently be very strong: one brass six-pounder, two iron four-pounders, and two swivels, mounted in the bastions . . . This was Mr. Hamilton's circumstance when Vigo left him."

But Clark had to confess to Vigo that, after all, he did not see how he could undertake the raid. Vigo was urging speed: "Now or never." Clark was compelled to reply, "I *can't.*" How could he equip even the humblest of expeditions? He was practically bankrupt. His Government had given him hardly any money to begin with—"twelve hundred pounds for conquering an Empire", Judge Law puts it—and whatever little he had left was now worthless.

[1]The Americans were prone to style Vincennes *Saint Vincent's*, because Vinsene or Vincennes called to their minds the name of Vincent, and the subconscious memory of the West Indian Island of St. Vincent, more famous in those smuggling days than now, supplied the rest. They felt that French Canada could hardly object to one more saint being added to its already interminable gazetteer of hagiology! The British were more likely to call Vincennes "the Opost," weird name traceable to early French letters dated "*Au Poste* Vinsene."

It was Virginia paper, supposedly redeemable by Oliver Pollock, the Virginia fiscal agent at New Orleans, whereas settlers in the Midwest wilderness knew and accepted only French silver *piastres* ("piastres fortes", which endured to our day in the ex-French Republic of Haiti.) Always depreciated, at first Clark's banknotes had been worth something; now, nothing. At the very moment of extreme need, when Vigo arrived at Kaskaskia, Pollock postponed cashing the I. O. U.'s which were now Clark's only resource, and finally refused to honor even the Colonel's formal bills on him. Vigo had risked his life and wrecked his trade in vain. Clark was in the depths. It was one of America's darkest hours.

But if a cat has seven lives, a Piedmontese has eight. For "die-hard" qualities, that race is unsurpassed! He was not going to be fooled that way. He, a stranger, had done his part for America—what were those Americans doing? He had been made to tell everybody that the Americans would take Vincennes, and now they *must* take it. His good faith was involved. His trade with the Canadians was involved. His position in Saint Louis, with the de Leybas, was involved. Didn't Colonel Clark see that *his own*

position with the de Leybas would become untenable? What? Pollock? Their own official agent would not honor the signature of their Commander-in-Chief? *"Per Dio!"* If Pollock the banker won't, Vigo the itinerant trader will. One can almost hear the surge of his passion, one can follow step by step the bitter logic that led to his superb sacrifice. "A Foreigner—that is what I am: Frenchman, Spaniard, Britisher, American, all of you call me a Foreigner; and I have no powerful country behind me, to support my claims later, to praise my gesture today. My country will be the Country which you Virginians are about to make now, or none. I know nothing of your old drafts, I can hardly read them. But here is my money, ALL MY MONEY: thousands of hard-earned *piastres,* just dug up from the 'cache' where I buried them before leaving on my errand; here is my credit—unlimited credit, for I trust you and your cause—with the merchants of Vincennes, when once you have taken the town which is even now waiting; and here are all the supplies of this Kaskaskia store of mine, to start you off. But go, *go,* GO!"

Clark went. Forty-eight hours later, he and his party of 172, rapidly equipped with Vigo's

cash and supplies, were disappearing in the Wilderness, eastbound. A long time would pass before the gallant Colonel beheld Pollock's sarcastic letter explaining his refusal to extend further credit to the Americans: "How Colonel Clark and the State of Virginia expect such heavy sums to be paid by men without money, is a mystery which only time can point out." It is the quintessence of irony that the Fiscal Agent's letter was written on the very same day when Vigo, the stranger, was turning over his entire fortune as an unprotected, unregistered, unlimited loan, which he never could collect if Clark failed—and which he never *did* collect even though Clark, by winning a skirmish, annexed an empire.

The cynical proverb says, "Your heart is where your money is"; Vigo reversed it, putting all his money where his heart was. Not only his money, in fact, but—directly or indirectly—most of the money of that Midwest, which through his *beau geste* (backed by his proverbial persuasiveness) became American in currency also; because the immeasurable financial contribution of Vigo to the American cause can only be appreciated by realizing that not only did he turn over to Clark all the "hard

money" he had, but both at the American Posts while Clark was fighting, and at Vincennes after Clark's victory, he practically compelled the civil population to accept American currency (as we shall see in detail later) by guaranteeing personally the ultimate redemption of that most unpopular paper; a clause, this, which ultimately proved his Waterloo. But it saved America.

* * *

Clark was rapidly leading his little army to Vincennes. The ever picturesque Virginian rode a half-tamed stallion from far-away New Mexico. Behind came a motley group of "Long Knives" and Creoles—about half of each—many of them "anctious to retrieve their Characters"! All had been granted absolution before leaving Kaskaskia, as the general feeling seemed to be that the chances of their surviving were slight. The Midwest of those days was nothing if not colorful.

It is not within the scope of this book to follow step by step the advance of the raiding party; furthermore, it has been admirably done during the last few years, sympathetically dealing with the lovable Colonel but also reducing within increasingly logical proportions his mili-

tary deed, which he distorted so in his Memoirs that it earned for him the bombastic name of "Washington of the West". Its *effects* were indeed far-reaching; but the fact that New York City is built upon that Manhattan Island which the White Man bought from the Red for twenty dollars does not make that $20 any larger! With Teresa in his heart and Vigo's detailed "intelligence" in his mind, the fiery Virginian and his party, who had started on February 5th, on the 22nd had crossed the two hundred miles of wretched jungle, thoroughly flooded in that unseasonably sultry winter weather, and finally heard "the morning and evening guns at the Fort" (Bowman's Journal).

The next morning, the fully soaked men having reached a small hill of dry land, they took a prisoner; a duck hunter from Vincennes, who told them that their speed and daring had saved them: no one at the Fort could suspect an attack in that season of the year. Vigo's advice had borne fruit!

Clark decided to use this "fowler" as messenger to the civil population, which he knew, through Vigo, to be in sympathy with him. "Remain still in your houses; and those, if any there

are, that are friends to the King, will instantly repair to the Fort, and join the HAIRBUYER GENERAL, and fight like men. On the contrary, those who are true friends to Liberty will be well treated." The message was translated into French by some Mississippi Creoles in Clark's party, since the Colonel, different indeed from Vigo the linguist, had no knowledge of that language, so essential throughout the Valley.

The following morning at sunrise, Clark attacked the Fort. In order to distribute according to strict justice, and not to chauvinism, the merits of the Vincennes enterprise, I must deal, if not with the military, at least with the diplomatic phase of the events which took place before the earthworks of the British Fort on that fateful February 24th, 1779.

After a number of desultory shots on both sides, the Virginian sent the celebrated haughty message, which is so typical of the youthful, impetuous Clark:

"Sir:

In order to save yourself from the impending storm that now threatens you, I order you immediately to surrender yourself, with all your garrison, stores, etc. etc.; for if I am

> obliged to storm, you may depend on such treatment as is justly due to a murderer. Beware of destroying stores of any kind, or any papers or letters that are in your possession, or hurting one house in town, for by the Heavens, if you do, there shall be no mercy shown you.
>
> G. R. CLARK."

"Do not hurt one house in town, for by the Heavens, if you do, etc."; this phrase must have provided food for thought to the British General. The "town"! Who cared for "the town" anyway? The Fort was the thing, not those frog-eaters. Why should the Americans be so solicitous of the civil population of Post Vincennes? It had acted queerly toward the military authorities since the Spanish Merchant had lingered among those gullible Canadians, earlier in the winter, and stuffed their simple heads with notions. *How would they behave now?* After all, they were several hundred, and if they joined in a body the almost two hundred attackers from Kaskaskia they might storm the Fort (then defended by seventy-nine soldiers) quite easily. That worried General Hamilton most. Everything considered, he thought wise to reply to Colonel Clark's stinging ulti-

matum by a short dignified message, which, considering the provocation, seems mild:

> "Governor Hamilton begs leave to acquaint Colonel Clark, that he and his garrison are not disposed to be awed into any action unworthy of British subjects."

And so the fight was resumed, neither side making much headway.

But by noon something extraordinary happened. Hamilton, who had spoken the last word in the parleying, and who was therefore supposed to speak henceforth only "through the mouth of his cannon", sent another message to Clark, suggesting a truce of a few days, and inviting the Colonel to go into the Fort, under a Flag of Truce, to discuss its details. In order to show that this was not a trap, he added: "If Colonel Clark makes a difficulty of coming into the Fort, Lieutenant Governor Hamilton will speak with him by the Gate."

Obviously, Hamilton was relenting. Why? He had plenty of food and ammunition, the best Fort in "the Valley", loyal and trained troops in sufficient numbers to face Clark's motley assemblage, which he must have sized up by this time as totally inexperienced and worn out by hardships, even though daring: he could

have held out indefinitely against the Virginians. But he was afraid of the town—of Post Vincennes, properly Americanized by Vigo—which only the day before had given to him, Hamilton, another proof of its "disloyalty" in its behavior toward a scalping party. This is an episode which I consider quite important for the understanding of Hamilton's change of front, but which is passed in silence by practically all writers upon the Battle of Vincennes, because the flamboyant Clark had no part in it. Yet it is one of the few items of tangible evidence we have as to Vigo's persuasive work with the Vincennians.

On the evening before Clark "stormed", a party of Indians friendly to the British, on their way back to their camps near Vincennes from a scalping raid, crossed the town exhibiting their gruesome trophies, as they were wont to do, and recounting their triumphs. Instead of meeting the Indians with either approval or indifference, the French Canadian population rose as a body and attacked them, killing two and chasing the others away. Clark's men had no part in that encounter: it was entirely Vincennes' own doing. It is easy to see what would happen now to the civil population of Vin-

cennes, in retaliation, if Clark was beaten; and Hamilton knew well that the Vincennians could not afford—in self-protection—to let Clark be beaten!

The great fear of the British defenders, then, was the town, or, to be more specific, the possibility of ample re-inforcements to Clark's attacking party through the townspeople. Naturally, Clark's own report does not stress that fact, nor do the blood-and-thunder writers of Patriotic Literature for Red-Blooded Boys. The masses want the traitor or the Demi-God, nothing else will do. If the story of the capture of Vincennes were told as it actually did happen, one more considerable fraction of the glory of that campaign would go to Vigo, until its leading military figure would be found in possession of a minority of the stock, as it were; and that, in the long run, might weaken the R. O. T. C. and the Citizens' Training Camps.

The fact is, that a careful reading even of Clark's own Memoirs shows, by indirection, that he would never have taken Vincennes had not the town been disposed toward him as it was. Who can fight against cannon with just "long knives"? Yet those came near being the only weapons of Clark's men; for THE POW-

DER USED BY THE VIRGINIANS IN FIGHTING AGAINST FORT VINCENNES HAD BEEN GIVEN THEM BY POST VINCENNES. Clark's own powder was practically gone when he needed it most, and whatever he had left, was so soaked as not to be fit to use. But he was amply supplied by the Vincennians who had buried theirs, and, hearing of the Colonel's plight, produced it at once. When one realizes that they were thus giving up the only possibility of defending themselves later from Hamilton's revenge for the scalping party episode, in case Clark's attack failed; and, even more important, that this powder was pure contraband, since the civil population was supposed to have been disarmed by Hamilton for their earlier affront to the British Colors—then one must reach the conclusion, if he had not already reached it before, that a pretty radical re-apportioning of glory for the conquest of Vincennes is in order.

* * *

It is quite evident that Clark could not agree to the "truce of a few days" suggested by Hamilton, although his hungry and ragged troops might be in better shape at the end of that period. Had he not found out, *from Vigo,*

that Hamilton expected re-inforcements from Detroit just as soon as they could get through? If Clark had been able to bring one hundred and seventy-two men from Kaskaskia, the Britishers might already be attempting a similar expedition from Detroit. Vigo had warned against any postponement, and Hamilton's offer was accordingly refused, with a note still firm but less insolent than the first. Proximity to the very English General Hamilton was apparently polishing Clark's manner at full speed!

Clark showed himself a keen psychologist in this second note. He realized by this time that Hamilton dreaded the town more than anything else; so he turned the tables on his correspondent, and, without discussing why he would not go into the Fort or up to its gate to confer with the British General, he made a striking counter-proposition:

> "IF MR. HAMILTON WANTS TO TALK WITH COLONEL CLARK, HE WILL MEET HIM AT THE CHURCH."

The church! Home and inspirer, epitome of the civilization of the settlers, abode of their dead, adviser of religious and social behavior; it was on such spiritually foreign ground that

Hamilton was asked to come and discuss the future of the "Opost". He had a sword of Damocles suspended over his head, and Clark lost no opportunity of pointing to it. The Virginian was so sure of his ground, *from Vigo's report and from the Post's attitude on the previous day,* that he was willing to test the sympathies of those Canadians in the same church where, only a few weeks before Vigo's arrival, they had formally sworn this pledge of renunciation of their American sympathies:

> "WE, the undersigned, declare and acknowledge to have taken the oath of allegiance to Congress, in doing which we have forgotten our duty to God and have failed in our duty to man. We ask pardon of God, and we hope from the goodness of our legitimate Sovereign, the King of England, that He will accept our submission and take us under His protection as good and faithful subjects, which we promise and swear to become, before God and before man."

Now Clark may or may not have known the terms of that humble retraction, but he did know that the population of the Post was now anxious to have that disgraceful page in its history well forgotten through its present behavior. And, what is even more decisive, while

Hamilton felt an increasing fear of the town, he also understood from Clark's note that the Virginian knew of that fear; which is the worst thing that may happen in such cases. The Britisher then lost all hope, and the desultory fighting which went on for a little while after he received the second Clark note, was, on his part, merely a face-saving device. In this respect, perhaps the most felicitous description of the whole situation is the one given by Dr. C. C. Graham: "Hamilton *had* notice of Clark's approach," he says, differing in this respect from the common version; "but the French and Indian inhabitants, six hundred in number *(this figure must include a whole lot of Indians)* were in sympathy with the Americans; Hamilton, seeing that the citizens were against him, was paralyzed with alarm, of which Clark took advantage."

Against this logical explanation of the fall of Vincennes march the romancers in full array, led, regrettably enough, by Colonel Clark himself in his Memoirs. The town is forgotten, Vigo is forgotten, Hamilton's psychology is forgotten; it all becomes a matter of the superhuman exploits of the Sons of Freedom. An earlier and more gullible America, all but besotted by her phobia of not appearing bigger and better than

anybody else, may have tried to explain the inadequacy of Hamilton's defense of Vincennes by painting for us a Servant of Tyranny terrorized by the long knives of a motley assemblage of wild Kentuckians and irrepressible Creoles, but for us iconoclasts and "Missourians" of the present generation such poppycock won't do. Are we really expected to continue to believe, under penalty of being labeled disloyal, the time-honored fantastic fairy tales on the conquest of Vincennes? That each of the Virginians had ten flags, and that by moving them constantly to and fro behind a hillock Clark made the garrison believe that the besiegers were ten times as many? That on being told (how?) that poor Captain Helm was drinking toddy with General Hamilton by the chimney, he had his men shoot at the chimney so that the kalsomining might fall into the toddy? Shades of Washington and the cherry tree! Must an Italian inherit the credulity of earlier generations of Americans, in order to be worthy of sharing with their descendants the New World which Columbus discovered? "The truth shall make us free." Those regrettable destroyers of pet legends, which are called statistics, show us that NOT ONE AMERICAN LOST HIS LIFE IN THE

BATTLE OF VINCENNES! Let Clark talk all he wants about Helm's toddy and the multiplication of flags, the fact remains that it was Post Vincennes which cowed, potentially at least, Fort Vincennes. And the greatest trick of Clark on the memorable day was not that of stirring so belligerently the toddy of those two military men, but that of pointing out to General Hamilton that in their struggle there was involved something more than two detachments of soldiers facing each other: there was a third element, determined and decisive—Canadian pioneers by the hundred, ready to be re-inforced by the Grand Kite and his whole Nation, all of them reported as "Americanized" by Vigo—which could be thrown any minute into the mêlée, on the American side.

That is why Hamilton, who was neither a coward nor a fool, realized that further resistance was futile; and, less than twenty-four hours after he had been made aware of Clark's very presence in Vincennes, he was ready to hand to the dashing Virginian the tangible proof of his own defeat in the following terms:

> "Governor Hamilton agrees to deliver over to Colonel Clark Fort Sackville *(the official British name for Fort Vincennes)* as it is at

present, with all its stores, etc.—The garrison are to deliver themselves as prisoners of war, and march out with their arms and accoutrements.—The garrison to be delivered up tomorrow at ten o'clock.—Three days time to be allowed the garrison to settle their accounts with the inhabitants and traders.—The officers of the garrison to be allowed their necessary baggage, etc.—Signed at Post Saint Vincents, February 24, 1779.

HENRY HAMILTON,
Lieut. Governor and Superintendent."

The next morning, at ten o'clock, General Hamilton marched out at the head of his garrison, as a "prisoner of war" ultimately bound for Virginia. How important this capture appeared in the East is shown by Thomas Jefferson's letter to Clark, dated Williamsburg, October 24, 1779:

. . . "Colonel Mathews came to New York . . . that himself should be permitted to remain in Virginia on parole if Lieutenant Colonel Hamilton were permitted to go to New York on parole—their rank being the same. It was determined that Colonel Hamilton should not go to New York. The capture and detention of Hamilton has solely prevented the laying our frontiers in blood this summer, which might have been expected from the very extensive combination of In-

> dians he had engaged in his service. I think he will not be exchanged on any terms during the war."

The many Americans acquainted with Hamilton, Canada, and Hamilton, Bermuda—both named after the defender of Fort Vincennes—may thank Vigo if there isn't a "Hamilton, Province of Indiana" in the heart of their Continent.

* * *

For over one century and a half the Battle of Vincennes has been discussed in print, and, as evidence continued to accumulate, each chronicler and historian who could lay claim to impartiality found its military exploits less remarkable, its international consequences more far-reaching. In the present status of the evidence —and it is doubtful whether at this late date much more can be found—the outstanding fact appears that the civilians' incognita, not the combatants' weapons, decided the struggle. Neither the much feared British cannon (of which Hamilton was able to bring into action no less than twelve) nor the far-famed marksmanship of the "Long Knives" dealt appreciable destruction on that day. The corollary that can safely be drawn is that the battle which

marked the turning point in the ownership of the Midwest was, militarily, not much more than a joke, gallant though the preparatory raid had been. In view of that, to which man does American Vincennes owe her greater debt of gratitude — Clark, or Vigo? I leave it to America's proverbial fairness to decide.

CHAPTER VI

A Foreigner Saves America's Credit

WHERE was Vigo at the time of Clark's raid on Vincennes?

Surely no one would expect this man, who as late as the following year (1780) was still registered, officially at least, as a private in the Spanish Militia of Saint Louis, to have joined the "Long Knives" of Clark's expeditionary corps—among whom our Piedmontese would have felt like a fish out of water, anyway. Nor was he the type who arrives the next day, to distribute flags and take charge of the fireworks. Aside from the fact that he abhorred publicity, and felt wretched when its searchlight was for any reason focused upon him, Vigo's imperative duty as a Builder of America was now elsewhere, and it taxed to the full his tested qualities of ubiquitousness, persuasiveness, and ingenuity. Since Pollock was now systematically refusing to honor Clark's signature (the poor man was hardly to blame, he had already be-

come a bankrupt by shouldering for so long a period the financial burdens of an insolvent Virginia), Vigo had to do it. In a sense, the amateur spy had now become amateur fiscal agent! And here was the beginning of those "Vigo Claims", celebrated in the legal history of America, which kept Courts high and low, Congressional Committees, and the Treasury Department busy for practically one round century.

Every student of economics knows that as soon as a country begins to make use of two kinds of currency, one safer than the other, the "good" kind mysteriously disappears, and the "bad" one floods the land. This "flooding" was the natural fate of Virginia paper. "Give it to Vigo, who takes it at par!" Naturally, it kept on drifting there. It was even counterfeited at one time, in the hope perhaps that the semi-illiterate Vigo could not detect the difference: little did the counterfeiters realize that an illiterate person may not be able to *read* what a note says, but his faculty of detecting other elements of genuineness is often sharper than that of a schooled observer. "What does *Dollar* mean?", Vigo's French customers used to ask. "*Dollar* is American for *Douleur*" ("sor-

row"), he answered. And why not? He personally knew it to be so. At Kaskaskia, a pound of coffee used to cost the equivalent of an American dollar, in hard French money (silver *piastres*) of course. When the moment of paying came, the customer, who until then had shown no cash, would extract the amount due in Virginia notes, saying "dollars"; to which Vigo replied "douleurs", accepting at par, out of loyalty to his new Country, those dollars which were worth about twenty cents when he started as a sponsor of America's currency, and ended by being worth about five. This episode, which Vigo himself loved to relate in his old age, has a human as well as an economic significance. It shows that this man who was fast becoming the Merchant Prince of the Midwest, whenever he emerged from the Wilderness to establish connection with the stores he had by this time opened in each of the more important settlements, was not ashamed to "walk behind the counter" and to do business in person with the most humble customers of his retail trade.

However ruinous these Virginia money transactions may have been, now of all times Vigo could not back out, if he rightly understood his obligations to the government he had deter-

mined to serve. The entire group of Valley settlements (the reader must have noticed that for practical purposes I am using this somewhat vague term to include Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and the others in the "American Bottom", Spanish Saint Louis, and Vincennes until so recently British) was now in a state of anarchy: it is a mystery to me why their inhabitants were not all slaughtered by the Indians, in the years immediately following that fateful 1779. The central Government—that "Virginia" which would soon be known here also as "The United States", and spread the new starry flag over them all—was doing neither one of the two things to be done by a state eager to rule *de facto* as well *de jure,* namely, provide a decent administration and a passable currency. Instead, it found fault with the dwellers of those "un-American" settlements for not running themselves from within, and for continuing to transact official business in the only language they knew; and threatened to declare them public enemies if they did not accept a currency which soon the free markets of New Orleans and Detroit refused to accept at any figure. Clark, once his Vincennes victory over, had gone (he only stopped in Vincennes about two weeks),

and was now planning big schemes, both good and bad, to be backed by a Government without money and without sober vision, pestered by thousands of land grabbers. It was Vigo who, much as he hated the effete East, in the fall of 1779 had to go over to Williamsburg to make arrangements with Governor Patrick Henry for some sort of supplies to be provided to the Army; also, to inform headquarters concerning Indian conditions as the withdrawal of the British to Detroit had left them in the Valley. But the East was just wrapped up in military victories and political intrigues, and Vigo was glad to get away and return to his Forest.

A new situation was arising in the Midwest. The British Red Coats were now out of the whole Valley; but the Indians, whom the East had underestimated, had to be won over; immigrants from Virginia and Kentucky were beginning to stream in, avaricious folk talking Flag and dreaming Eldorado; and Clark's veterans, as well as a motley crowd of adventurers, were carving for themselves, with apparent official sanction, huge tracts of the newly conquered territory. How sick at heart that crowd of carrion birds and of "well-deserving heroes" must have made Vigo! In the Vincennes which he

made American, the Vigo holdings as they appear from the records are so typically different from the fantastic claims of the veterans and "carpet-baggers":

> "Francis Vigo—Three pieces of land (we would call them 'blocks') in the old Indian Village, sold by *Montour* and other Chiefs to Spring and Busseron, in May, 1786."
> "Francis Vigo—Five pieces of land formerly held by *'the Kettle Carrier',* sold by *Quiquilaquia,* the grandson of *'the Kettle Carrier',* with the approval of *Montour* and the other chiefs."
> "Francis Vigo,—Five pieces of land in the old Piankeshaw town, sold by *Montour."*

It was more like what we would call now "suburban real estate", in comparatively small units, and what is more it was always *bought,* not secured for the asking as a gratitude claim. Whereas the same books record "grants" to importunate "concessionaires" like the following:

> "Thomas Flower, FORTYONE THOUSAND ACRES."
> "Jonathan Purcell, TWENTYSEVEN THOUSAND ACRES."

And, since appetite grows with eating, the said Thomas Flower, finding perhaps that he

had been too reticent when he figured his Country's obligation to him at only 41,000 acres, demands an additional 20,000; those also being granted, we find him asking once more, this time in such terms that he would not have to trouble the Court too soon again:

> "Thomas Flower,—claims an uncertain quantity of land."

Indeed the Vincennes land records prove that "to the victor belong the spoils"!

These transactions and others along the same lines were bad enough, yet the orgy was only beginning. The moment came when the four Vincennes judges upon whom all this distribution of land devolved, tired of helping others, decided that charity begins at home, and, resorting to a clever method, voted to themselves huge grants: one of their number would retire, and the other three, in his absence, made the grant of land to him. Then he would return, and one of the other judges retired, only to be granted, in turn, more land. By this system, Their Honors Bosseron, Deline, Gamelin, and Querez (*His Honor* Querez, however, being illiterate, could only acquiesce in the distribution and acceptance of land by making the mark

of a cross), had, by the year 1802, already distributed to themselves a territory extending from the Wabash to the White River, and forty leagues to the west by thirty to the east!

While so shameful an exhibition of graft and greed was going on, Vigo, suffering this disgrace and discrimination in silence as he had suffered in silence the Gibault apotheosis, was straining every nerve to recoup his losses by feverishly trading in the Wilderness, at a troubled time when no other American dared to do business there. These complex plans involving *baratteria* did not even tempt the Italian: he was no good at such schemes. The games he played were risky, but straight.

General Hamilton being now a prisoner in Virginia, Vigo began revisiting Vincennes, vociferously welcomed by a population to which he was becoming more and more attached, although for some years this extremely versatile individual was so enmeshed in a network of private undertakings and public services that he could not settle down for long, there or anywhere else. His home for this period was the Great Valley, the Heart of America; his friends, all those men, Red or White, who served the Wilderness with filial spirit. Just because there

were no more international battles, must one conclude that the halcyon days of Vigo's usefulness were over, or that the precious qualities of his empire-building personality found no more ways of asserting themselves?

Personally, I think that these few years when he represented the only stability, the sole item of permanence in an immense region at the mercy of virtual anarchy, are at the same time the most entrancing and the most typical of his life. Behind the Builder, the Adventurer had always lurked in his nature; and here they could both happily, ethically, constructively co-exist. For several years, in the heart of the Continent everything was in a fluid, transitory stage, except Vigo. "Which allegiance, which tongue, which currency next?"—"The American", Vigo preached and practised: and if this neutral foreigner, surpassing linguist, and far-seeing merchant said so, it *must* be so.

What a mess throughout that Mississippi and Wabash country in the late seventies and early eighties! Politically, economically, judicially, linguistically, socially, the situation created by the almost automatic fall of Vincennes had been grotesque. The earlier equilibrium, created by the proximity and interrelation of

an American Kaskaskia, a Spanish Saint Louis, and an English Vincennes, with their respective Indian hinterlands, was gone, and only disintegration had ensued. The Indians, sensing that while the British program had been one of exploitation, the American would be one of ultimate extermination, were sulky, and moodily marked time, awaiting developments. The French Canadians, accustomed to an aristocratic social system, could not be made to run their own towns according to the ways of democracy. The official language of the new Country might now be English, but nobody knew how to use it. Latin justice, based upon the concepts and machinery of Roman Law, must no longer be enforced, yet nobody seemed to know how to apply the new American legal standards to local conditions. The official currency was now that of Virginia—paper, and nothing but paper—which everybody's friend, Vigo, inexplicably tried to force upon the reluctant people, much to their disgust. The traders were all English subjects except for a sprinkling of Louisianans, and the lone American Vigo! French Canadian officials, soldiers, etc., despite their contribution to Virginia, were fast being replaced by "Americans". The towns, all of which

now flew the American Flag, became distressingly larger and larger, since so much ground all around the old settlements had been taken over and desultorily occupied by veterans, concessionaires, land agents for Eastern concerns, adventurers. But the Indians, hitherto part and parcel of the White communities, where they used to trade and on the outskirts of which they were wont to pitch their tents, now shunned the towns and had withdrawn deep into the Forest, dealing only with the British traders and preparing for trouble. What the Americans owned was, in reality, but an archipelago of distant islands (on which active coral builders were fast at work), but with no fleet to make them into a unit. Dissatisfaction was universal, and Vigo was kept continuously busy straightening out international and inter-racial troubles. Even the Treaty of 1783 did not relieve the tension, as we shall see later.

To make things worse, the winter of 1779-80 —which was for Vincennes the first, for Kaskaskia and Cahokia the second under the flag of Virginia—was cruelly bitter, and conditions were such that no supplies could be brought over from afar. Here was the test of the "Americanization" of those French Canadian

settlements! And the town which behaved most loyally throughout that ordeal was Vincennes—Vigo's Vincennes. Despite the fact that its aristocratic outstanding position was now gone, the ex-Canadians helped their new masters to the very limit of their possibilities. Colonel Montgomery gratefully acknowledges it:

> "Everything animate and inanimate groans under a most unsupportable burden of severe winter. Notwithstanding their distress, the French at Vincennes are ready to divide their slender stock of provisions with the troops in the garrison and render them every other assistance within their power."

And when they could not do it, Vigo did. When the next hard winter set in, in 1787, and no food could be secured at Vincennes for garrison or civilians, the population being decimated by hunger and disease, he managed to furnish "Fort Patrick Henry", as the Vincennes fort had been renamed, with no less than 17,000 rations, thus saving the garrison for America. "The troops of the United States, as well as their interest in general, would have suffered at this place, had it not been for his [Vigo's] assistance", Major Hamtramck wrote then to General Harmar; "I cannot tell you how much

obligation I have to that gentleman." I have mentioned these details, which may appear chronologically out of place, merely to prove my contention that from the day when Vigo set himself the task of the "Americanization" of Vincennes, that community, whether with or without Vigo, remained patriotic and helpful and loyal. Yet at that time even the ex-conqueror of Vincennes, George Rogers Clark, had so wavered in his loyalty to the Country which did not seem to know how to govern the lands he had won in battle, that he was making arrangements to offer his services to Spain and France, actually as one of their subjects! And Gibault was now in disgrace; while Laffont had gone to live under the Spanish Flag. When all is said and done, Francis Vigo was about the only prominent person who remained steadfast in that general picture of demoralization and disappointment.

Rapidly he moved from settlement to settlement, from tribe to tribe, from garrison to garrison. All his customers hated or distrusted each other—French Canadians, Americans, Indians, British—yet Vigo freely did business with them all, for they all loved him. And it is sad to admit that despite the internationalism of his experi-

ences, the only country which caused him prolonged and unnecessary sorrow and distress was the United States, whose allegiance he enthusiastically sponsored, whose financial victory against overwhelming odds he advocated so strenuously at his own expense.

Even while the Indians were at war with each other, Vigo moved unharmed among the belligerents, just as he circulated freely among them when they were up in arms against the new White invaders—although he was known to be no longer a subject of Spain, and to have become one of those hated Americans. And, given the conditions, if he had been tomahawked he would probably have remained unavenged. But no savage would commit so heinous a crime against a harmless and friendly White man, who was also a reverent Son of the Forest: not a White man "gone Red", as so many of them did, but one simply unable to differentiate between aborigines and interlopers, as long as they followed what might be called "the Code of the Forest". Because Civilization has its codes, which it tries very hard not to keep, but the Wilderness has its Code, which MUST be kept—equal in today's Africa as it was in yesterday's America.

And well might the sophisticated European and American of today return to the elementals of that Code if they would endeavor to reform their social ethics, which are becoming scandalously low. Take the matter of obligations, since we are dealing with the career of a merchant: national, commercial, personal obligations. What showing does contemporary civilization make in that field, as compared with the standards of the Forest? The word of the most exalted States, business concerns, and individuals is becoming less than doubtful. States default, business concerns fail, and individuals become bankrupt, retaining their full self-respect —and often their full safe-deposit boxes. But in the Wilderness, a debt is a debt! In certain parts of Abyssinia a debtor unwilling or unjustifiably unable to pay not only becomes his creditor's slave, but is personally fastened to him for life by a conveniently long, yet most solid chain. In Continental Europe all a creditor can do is to send his recalcitrant debtor to jail. In these most civilized United States, I could mention a man who had the audacity to sue a brazenly defaulting woman debtor, obtaining a judgment against her, and must now see such debtor wrapped in furs yet officially swearing that she

is penniless; and be told by reputable lawyers that if he has the impudence to make trouble, the debtor will go to Court, state among sobs that the loan was really "heart balm" because of personal relations between creditor and debtor, and, despite all the man's denials and her total lack of evidence, either send him to jail or at least wreck his reputation. This may be styled "Chivalry in the Land of the Oppressed"; but, ethically, it is a grotesque distortion of both justice and common sense.

In the Forest Primæval, a debt is a sacred obligation, and does not need Notaries Public to register it, lawyers to uphold it, or even a piece of paper to record it on. A mark upon a tree-trunk, the testimony of a third party, or simply the common knowledge that *A* is indebted to *B* to the extent of so many dollars, furs, cowries, or elephant's tusks, are more than sufficient. There is no limit of time, of course; heirs, personal or tribal, take up the obligation together with the estate. Capacity to pay, not definiteness of original obligation, is the decisive factor in re-adjustments; and a creditor loses all his trade and prestige if he forces or tries to force his debtor to pay before such

debtor is so situated that he can afford to return the money or the goods which had been loaned.

It is when one considers Vigo in just such a light, as the personal embodiment of the Wilderness and all its traits in the years of anarchy following the capture of Vincennes, that he finds it quite easy to understand why this primitive human, honorable by sheer instinct, did not formally enter at once his claims against the State of Virginia for ultimate refund of his advances of cash and merchandise, and was satisfied with reminding of them at different times, always somewhat timidly, his friends and fellow-builders now living in the ever more powerful East.

Francis Vigo knew very well that the State of Virginia was utterly unable to pay in the days following the raid on Vincennes and for several years thereafter, and, consequently, long held his peace. The list of men who had been reduced to poverty by Virginia's insolvency reads like an *Almanach de Gotha* of the Valley's own "noblemen": Nicholas Janis of Kaskaskia, Charles Gratiot of Cahokia, Francis Bosseron of Vincennes, Gabriel Cerré formerly of Kaskaskia and then of Saint Louis—to say nothing of Oliver Pollock, trying to keep out

of jail first in New Orleans and then in Havana for having become Fiscal Agent of a "land-poor" Government. It does not pay and it is inhuman to "hound" an honest but poor debtor; by dint of hard work Vigo could still keep his head above water, and could wait until America had consolidated her power and straightened out her finances. A debt is a debt: Virginia had incurred it, *of course* Virginia would pay! How could he know, and why should he care anyway, about the fact that 'way East the Government of Virginia, at the request of the United States of America, had turned over the Midwest lands to this new master *together with all debts appertaining thereunto?* And that the new master, to put an end to the ensuing orgy of vague demands, said that half a million dollars must pay for everything, set a time limit to the entering of claims, distributed a few driblets to the most petulant creditors who were clamoring from lawyers' offices in the Capital itself, and, when the $500,000 was spent, closed the door in the face of the others? In judging this matter, we must therefore take a middle course between the melodramatic version given by Faris, who suggests that Vigo's patriotism may have prevented him from saddening the in-

fant United States with a large bill, and the "pound of flesh" attitude of some critics who, forgetting the special conditions of the time and place, find Vigo guilty of not leaving everything and everybody and transporting his unpolished and foreign person to the National Capital to indulge in a few years of lobbying. They forget that when the United States became rich and strong, the impossible "time limit" clause was set aside in a number of instances, and the cases re-opened on their merits; they forget that poor Gratiot, who tried to do what Vigo technically ought to have done, spent months in gathering all his data, evidence, and testimony—had to proceed with the documents by way of New Orleans, Havana, North Carolina, and Richmond, for greater safety—kept on pleading for almost THREE YEARS at the National Capital, a host of strong friends lobbying for him—and finally received a fraction of his claim, mainly in tobacco, negroes, and undesirable land at a figure totally out of proportion with market prices, with barely a few hundred dollars in currency: far less than he had spent backing up his claim. No, the American who protests against the ways of the National Government

today does not realize that there was a time when they were even worse.

Furthermore, Gratiot had influential friends at the Capital: Vigo had none. Who were, where were his powerful friends at that period of Vigo's life? Governor de Leyba, to whom he owed his being a merchant, had died in 1780; and George Rogers Clark, to whom he owed his being an American, was becoming increasingly *persona non grata* with his superiors. Other friends, powerful in their day at least, now found themselves similarly in distress, or were the type of politician, agreeable enough, through whom nothing can be obtained which does not lead to his own advancement. He might have written, of course, submitting a full documentation of his credits, and so on—but how could he do it? The proofs of the loans to the various "Virginians" and their friends were not always on paper, some of the beneficiaries had vanished into thin air, others had fled the country and were now scheming against it; the advances included oral understandings with rough French woodsmen, cryptic signs carved upon tree-trunks, and the like; and then, when it came to writing—well, that was *not* Vigo's best accomplishment!

In any case, the legal aspects of the "Vigo Claims" belong to a much later period of his life, and will have to be discussed in a later chapter. But since some reference to his reluctance or inability to write has been made, it seems in order to look now into that matter of Vigo's suggested illiteracy, always from the standpoint of his being the perfect *vir nemoris,* —an American Dryad, as it were. This limitation has been made to weigh too heavily against him, considering the circumstances. In the first place, although evidence (negative evidence, at that) is produced to show that he could not write much, if anything, beyond his own name, there is no evidence of any kind to support the theory that he could not *read;* in fact, everything points to the contrary. A merchant, never mind how primitive, dealing steadily with headquarters of trade as well as tapping the wilderness, is bound to learn how to read. And how could he be made to "deliver to the Indians" a number of "talks" with which he was later entrusted by the United States Government, unless they were given to him in writing? Granting that *he* may have felt confident, on account of his astounding memory, that he could memorize them so well as to repeat them word for word

weeks and months later, would the various officials who entrusted them to Vigo—from George Washington down—have felt safe in delivering them to him merely *viva voce,* since they were to be given to the Red Men, at a time of strained relations, as "signed" by the Great White Father and by others in most responsible positions?

But *writing* is another story. Little do we realize, in modern times when every child is taught so early and so skillfully the rudiments of that art, how hard it is for a grown-up without teachers to learn how to shape the various letters, how to bind them together, how to reconcile the spelling with the pronunciation of English. Incidentally, in what language would he be writing, anyway? Italian, Spanish, French, English? How the poor Vigo must have longed for an Esperanto, or at least an American *lingua franca,* that would cross political and cultural frontiers! Suppose he *had* learned a little Italian and Spanish spelling, earlier in life; he would become all twisted when meeting the intricacies of French spelling, in New Orleans and early Vincennes. And suppose he finally could grope his way somehow among those: English, the language of his final civilization,

would then present itself and say, "Those rules are all wrong—start all over again." It would be enough to make him throw up his arms in despair, and entrust letter-writing to one of his many assistants, while he added only one word on which there were no possible variations, "VIGO" in the characteristic full capitals. With plenty of French and English amanuenses of a kind all about him, why should this foreigner indulge in a poor imitation of the writings of that time and place, which were not exactly masterpieces of correctness? The Clerk of the Court at Kaskaskia, "Paris of the West"—where the population had protested against the use of English, because it only "knew French"—knew it so well that he certified legal papers in this guise:

> *"Je sertiffie que Les present ordonnances y dessus Est Comforme au minut."*

And the English of the Midwest Americans was hardly better; here is the official report on some spirited balloting, in the version of the most learned of its judicial witnesses, Captain Moore:

> *"An Ellection was held and the Voats stands as folows . . ."*

And could the superior officers, supreme au-

thorities in the Valley for a considerable period of time, do much better? The reader may judge it for himself from this specimen of official prose:

> *"Since My arivel here have Beene under the needsatisety of havein som men whipt a muncks hom Mr. Joins. I rote the inhabetents a verey sharp letter."* (Colonel Montgomery to George Rogers Clark, September 29, 1779.)

Everything considered, Vigo showed pretty good taste by speaking all the languages of the Mississippi Valley, but not attempting to write any, especially since his work in the Wide Open Spaces did not make so imperative the *"needsatisety"* of his doing so!

Others would come later to "polish" the Midwest; the task of this foreign merchant was that of making it American, and he succeeded surpassing well.

CHAPTER VII

"Unbottling" the Mississippi

SOLITUDE is a good adviser for the "master mind". In the eternal interplay between *analysis* and *synthesis* which take turns in ruling every thought of mankind, the former profits and the latter suffers by human contact, and thus both loneliness and companionship are alternately sought by the masses, whose rôle in the mighty scheme of life seems that of keeping in motion the endless chain of the human race; but the significant phases in world progress are solely the product of the *synthetic* thought of the "master minds" soaring above the sordid succession of inconsequential details which satisfy and stultify the minds of the lowly. Therefore, solitude is the ideal state for the man of brains, whether he be a Mystic or an Empire Builder.

The millennial solitude of the Forest must have suggested to Vigo, some time during the early 1780's, a new scheme to help America solve her problem of real ownership of the

Midwest, which, instead of being settled by the Treaty of Peace of 1783 between America and Britain, had reached such an *impasse* that it was fatally leading to another conflict or series of conflicts. Had Vigo done nothing else, he would deserve on this count to go down into history as one of America's noblemen: because his plan meant the giving of the Midwest to America *de facto* as well as *de jure,* by the double program of eliminating, without offense to anybody, the conditions which stood in the way, and of creating contemporaneously new conditions which would automatically Americanize that region. Jealousy, narrow-mindedness, and lack of initiative were to wreck after an initial success his two-fold plan, ultimately ruining its sponsor and leading the United States to endless Indian campaigns, and eventually to the accumulation of grievances forming the substratum of the War of 1812 against Britain, which had long been brewing. In order fully to understand the Vigo plan, we must see what the Peace Treaty of 1783 had done to the Valley.

In a distant city called Paris, on the 3rd of September, 1783, an assemblage of important gentlemen announced formally what everybody

knew to be a fact: that the last British soldier had been seen south of the Great Lakes. It also announced what everybody in inner circles knew *not* to be a fact, and that is that England and her rebellious colonists were now at peace.

Peace! The Valley knew better. The East, which saw its fully advertised Victory of Vincennes change the color of a huge section of the map of America, was elated. But the British said nothing, knowing that their former enemies had won only a "paper victory". By playing a waiting game, they could prevent the United States from deriving any benefit from their acquisitions. The key to the whole situation is given by two words: Merchandise, and Indians. The Treaty could settle neither problem. Vigo tried to settle both. Let us see how.

The Anglo-American interweaving of authority which followed the Peace of Paris would delight any lover of the grotesque, although it almost distracted the Valley settlements. We have seen that the Stars and Stripes were waving over Kaskaskia, Vincennes, and so on; but the goods the Midwest traded in were all Canadian (British), or Spanish; the Americans were unable to produce or import articles of their own wherewith to carry on that

Indian trade without which their little garrisons (often reduced to ten or twelve soldiers) were virtually besieged; even Vigo was compelled to use non-American goods for his trade, and all he could do about it, in the interest of his new Country, was to avail himself of his early Louisiana connections so as to import a minimum of British goods and a maximum of Spanish. As for the Indians, they simply would not submit to their homes being transferred under the authority of the United States, which they knew to be there not to rule them but to replace them; and in order to placate their infuriated customers, the British had to grant them land in Canada for permanent residence, while encouraging them to go hunting every year in their own former hunting grounds, now American, where the British would protect them to the best of their ability! Meanwhile, since England, by yielding territorially, had earned the right to keep the new American lands open to her own traders, and the Indians insisted on "presents" which the United States refused to donate, England herself still supplied the "presents", ostensibly in order to safeguard the security of her subjects who carried on business with the Red Men: a situation

which the Indians interpreted as one of Anglo-American condominium, to say the least. Were the British unethical in their attitude? Not more so than others were, or have been; nobody was likely to act too nobly, while the stakes were so high. It is only now, when the world is all first-mortgaged by the mighty, that a Kellogg Pact proclaims the obligation of universal honesty, outlawing the methods by which great countries came into being—which is tantamount to saying, "No one shall do tomorrow at our expense what we all did yesterday at somebody else's expense; from now on, we are all moral to the bone." There is splendid material for Aesop's Fables, or for the Nobel Prize: two praiseworthy aspects of the human drama which somebody ought to introduce to each other, for their choices of characters so often coincide or overlap.

Militarily also, things were going from bad to worse. Year after year passed without the British even evacuating the military Posts in the proximity of the Great Lakes, which they had formally ceded to the United States by the Treaty of 1783. The American garrisons were supposed to march in just as the British garrisons marched out. But since no specific date for

the transfer had been mentioned in the Treaty, the British found it easy to procrastinate until the Americans had fulfilled the last clause of that long and intricate Pact; or, more cleverly yet, they would pretend to be so upset by American insistence that they announced their intention of leaving overnight—which, as W. E. Stevens justly remarks, would have meant sure massacre of the entire civil population at the hands of the Indians. And when the Americans asked for a little more time, "All right," said or intimated the British, "then we shall stay until you carry out *all* your promises." How well this could be done can best be appreciated by those who remember that while the Treaty gave the British *full rights of navigation in the Mississippi, from whatever point it touched the joint boundary down to its mouth,* it also traced a boundary that *touched nowhere said Mississippi,* keeping it entirely within American territory—which, until the days of hydroplanes, constituted a most decided handicap for the fulfillment of that clause!

Vigo chafed frightfully under such impossible conditions. Ever a practical man, he sensed the folly of a romancing public opinion, which saw Americanization with the eyes of Mars and not

of Mercury, and which was so overjoyed at the disappearance of one government that it did nothing to put another one in its stead. Unfortunately, he was no statesman, and could do nothing to influence officially the minds of a public gone wild over the flight of the "Red Coats" at Vincennes, and for some little time talking about nothing else. Curious, how Fame dwarfs certain events and magnifies others, out of all logical proportions. The average "rebel" of that day considered the almost bloodless Vincennes skirmish as one of those desperate struggles *à la* Waterloo where defeat means more than the annihilation of an army: a turning point in our planet's history—the victor having little or nothing to do afterwards, since from then on he has "all the trumps".

However, if Vigo was not a statesman, he was more than *a* merchant: he had become by that time, as all testimony agrees, *the* merchant *par excellence* of the early Midwest. And as a super-merchant he felt he could perhaps carry out a vast scheme, which would truly and definitely free the Valley kept in practical bondage. It was without doubt the most far-reaching of plans for the furthering of the American cause in his day: the creation of an "All-America"

current of trade, in American hands irrespective of flags, that would connect the Gulf, the Atlantic, and the Great Lakes. It is only when one has read hundreds and hundreds of documents, official and private, French, Spanish, British, Canadian, and American, concerning that "bottling up" of the heart of the Country which remained the chief problem of the Mississippi Valley for several generations, that he becomes filled with admiration for the only man who seems to have realized that Americanizing the Midwest did not mean conquering this or that Fort and discouraging one or two British fur merchants, but uniting through a link of steady trade in American commodities owned by Americans the three geographical outposts of the Continent south of Canada and east of the Unknown: New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Before this time, the New Orleans current of trade reached strong and steady only as far north as Saint Louis; and that proceeding from Philadelphia lost all its force and regularity west of Pittsburgh. Commercially, the East and the Mississippi Valley had been two separate Americas; and Vigo quickly sensed the folly and the danger of it.

In the Vigo plan, the north-to-south line in-

volved no technical difficulties; it was only a matter of unifying two old trade routes, one Spanish and the other English, eliminating the friction and simplifying the transportation; also, explaining tactfully to the near-by Indians, some of whom were none too amenable to reason, that they had nothing to fear from that merger. But the line from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Seaboard presented a quantity of new problems: different transportation, different folk, different methods of trade. Yet that triangular line was useless unless complete—at least insofar as its political implications were concerned. And Vigo was after *unity,* not *money,* in his trade plan.

In a way, it is but natural that a man of the race and training of Vigo should have planned and carried out that vast scheme, which no true Spaniard, Britisher, or American had had the vision or the audacity to encompass. Synthesis, again! The distant hawk has a much vaster outlook than the indefatigable robin, so intent upon listening to the deep stirrings of endless near-by worms. The Spaniard, in planning for Mississippi Valley trade, thought: "Northward!"; the Britisher, "Southward!"; the native American, "Westward!" But Vigo, the Italian with

no local tradition, saw it all at one glance. That country was, obviously, *one;* and his training as a Spaniard, his social leanings toward the Canadians and Indians, and his loyalty to America, all pointed to him as to the one logical man capable of finally unifying by trade an America which had not been unified by the sword.

The commercial, industrial, and financial items of this scheme he could handle himself. His new fellow-countrymen, however, must endorse the ambitious plan not only with words, but by means of a three-fold help:—a new Indian policy, involving amity, or, at least, "presents"; conquest of Detroit, which, hitherto profiting by both the Eastern and the Southern trade, could not be expected to take kindly to this re-shuffling of values; and construction of a line of Forts from the East to Vincennes, so as to connect there with the north-to-south line reaching from New Orleans to the Great Lakes.

Accordingly, he began to shun the Lower Mississippi, theatre of his early exploits, which he knew to be able to take care of itself in the hands of trusted associates; he befriended the Indians even more than usual; and he inter-

ested himself—just to what extent it seems impossible to ascertain—in plans for the capture of Detroit.

George Rogers Clark's early scheme for an attack on Detroit had miserably failed; and the details of this failure must have shown to our steadfast Piedmontese the human material and the kind of organization he could rely upon in his new allegiance. Clark had counted on "two to three hundred troops from Kentucky" for this expedition, in addition to those he could spare from the Vincennes he had just occupied; and on February 27th, three days after his victory, he was actually promised five hundred more from Virginia, who "were starting at once". He then hastened to write to the British defender of Detroit, Captain Lernoult, "I am glad to hear that you are very busy making new works, as it saves the Americans some expences *(sic)* in building". Spies whom he despatched to Detroit having announced Clark's impending arrival, its French population openly celebrated Hamilton's defeat at Vincennes by a three-day *festa,* and children in the streets, with cups of water, drank success to Clark. But when words had to yield to *facts,* what the East finally sent to Clark for the Detroit campaign were thirty

men, mostly barefooted. The expedition did not even start.

But less than two years later, when the volatile Clark was pursuing totally different goals, another raid was planned against Detroit, under auspices in no way similar. While it cannot be proven that Vigo was instrumental in this one, the indications are that in his own unobtrusive way he was quite interested. A French officer, Augustin de la Balme, a friend of Lafayette, who had tried in vain to gather a sufficient army of volunteers from Pittsburgh to Kaskaskia for a raid on Detroit, reached Vincennes in July 1780, being there "received by the inhabitants as the Hebrews would receive the Messiah" (Kaskaskia Records). Yet if Vigo took part in that reception, it is doubtful whether he ended by helping La Balme more than half-heartedly, even though Detroit was the goal, because of La Balme's equivocal political attitude: he kept away from all Vincennes Americans, openly spoke against Clark, assured the inhabitants of "all imaginable assistance from the King of France" for the future conquerors of Detroit, and finally started off at the head of a grand total of eighty volunteers, *flying the French Flag.* That was not

Vigo's way of doing things: he had not Americanized his Vincennes Canadians in order to have them start for war under the French Flag, even though Detroit may be at stake. But they never reached Detroit, having been practically all massacred by Miami Indians (whom they had stupidly and unnecessarily provoked a few days before, en route to their goal) near where Fort Wayne, Indiana, now stands. A strong clue in favor of the theory that Vigo was not, at the start, a disinterested spectator, is given by the fact that in the discussion of the claims of the heirs of one Antoine Rembault of Vincennes, who had been killed under La Balme, Francis Vigo is called to testify on that expedition (see Vincennes Land Office Records for the year 1805).

Well, despite everything, Vigo was far from discouraged. Even if Detroit stayed out of the plan and the Lake Route was closed, the American Trade Route from the East to the Midwest could be created by land and river. A few presents to the Indians, a few Forts in strategic places, and there would be an end forever of that eternal "bottling up of the Valley". No Frenchman, Spaniard, or Britisher could henceforth stand in the way of a triumphant Amer-

ica linking by trade her North and her South with her East. (The West, the *real* West, was still a fearsome incognita.)

Feeling confident that only official slowness prevented the capital of his new Country from yielding to his logical request, Vigo, after obtaining the enthusiastic approval of such authorities as graced the new Midwest and the assurance that they would support him at Headquarters, struck out with his bold plan. Surely when the Government saw it successful it would hasten to help him, as it meant the salvation of the Heart of the Continent. The daring Piedmontese, disregarding all precedent, opened at his own risk the new line of trade. His boldness was the talk of the Valley, whose channels of trade and whose supply of goods had changed almost overnight.

Since the histories of American Trade Expansion are—for a change!—silent on this great glory of Francis Vigo, I wish to introduce some authoritative contemporary testimony.

In the famous detailed report on Midwest conditions which Major Doughty sent after a survey of the Mississippi Wilderness to the Secretary of War, following a faithful description of the various types of British and Spanish

merchants to be found in the new country, we come across this revealing statement:

> "We [the Americans] have no Trader, except Mr. Vigo; he is the only person who has for some years brought his merchandise *from the Atlantic States. . . .*" (The italics are mine.)

And Governor St. Clair, of the Northwest Territory—the original official name of the region accruing to the United States through the conquest of Vincennes—in the course of a discussion on imposts to be levied upon goods entering the Illinois settlements from Canada or Spain, proves his contention that the country could afford such imposts by stating that he personally knows of one merchant, BY THE NAME OF FRANCIS VIGO, who had imported there *goods from Philadelphia* and marketed them in the Mississippi country at prices lower than those quoted by the British merchants, "even though these American goods had been subjected to an impost from which the British goods were exempt". Which means in simpler language that the American Government had not begun to help Vigo, but had already started penalizing him, while he quietly went on underselling the foreign merchants! And soon enough, the ranks of British subjects trading in

the Valley began to thin out. Vigo was squeezing them out, gently but firmly, by the application of his novel theory that "American citizens must be given at least a chance to buy American goods in their own Country at prices no higher than foreign goods". How pathetic appears that effort of Vigo, in these days of America's intensive protection of her "infant industries"!

Usually, all plans of national protection of industry, whether genuinely or spuriously "infantile", involve a big navy, a lot of semi-official "dumping", a network of Trade Commissioners abroad, and so forth. Nothing of the kind was required here. However, Vigo insisted that a few Forts *must* be built along the east-and-west line of his trade triangle, perhaps those at the mouths of the Guyandotte, Big Sandy, and Licking Rivers, which Clark fervently requested as indispensable for military reasons; in the meantime, if the War Department did not have sufficient money for their construction and garrisoning, he could probably protect his own shipments by using the "convoy" system on the big rivers (André Michaux reporting the sight of a Vigo fleet when he visited Pittsburgh). But, in any case, the Government must not postpone one day longer the sending of at

least a few "presents to the Indians". That was imperative.

The American Government was horrified at the suggestion of this son of wicked Europe. Didn't he know that the United States had been raised on the Pinckney motto, "Millions for defense, not one cent for tribute"? Didn't he realize that giving something for nothing is immoral? What kind of an American was he, anyway? How sadly the realistic Italian Vigo, who knew the Indians so much better than all Washington put together, must have shaken his broad "Alpine" head at this novel manifestation of a theoretical view of life, which would underlie the entire career of his new Country! "Gratuities are un-American." Excellent, but try and enforce it. Vigo, the Italian, knew better; he was furious at this form of self-inflicted blindness. And, *si licet parva componere magnis,* this other Italian can understand Vigo so well! He remembers his own indignation when the College Entrance Examination Board struck out of his expense bill the ten cents paid to a station porter for helping him carry from train to taxicab a suitcase full of books, essential for the conscientious fulfillment of the duties entrusted to him by said Board. A ten-cent dis-

bursement for which there was no voucher! The people's money is sacred, it cannot be squandered on gratuities. Not one cent for tribute. . . . "Tribute", indeed! Between the alimony scandal, racketeering high and low, and the compulsory and ever more expensive upkeep of administrations, civic and otherwise, which do not know how to administer, this Country has now learned something about the levying of sinister and wasteful tribute. Its wilderness of yesterday was far cleaner than its sophistication of today.

However, yesterday and today are alike in America when it comes to official unwillingness to acknowledge human imperfections. It was 1795—sixteen years after the conquest of the Valley—before the United States came to see that "presents to the Indians" were as unavoidable as hail and earthquakes; and even then, all that President Washington dared suggest was the yearly expenditure of fifty thousand dollars. After the massacre of La Balme's raiders, Britain had spent *eighty-four thousand pounds* in presents to her near-by Indians to reward them for their "over-indulgence"!

Left without any form of official assistance, in fact antagonized *de facto* if not *de jure* by a

policy of general unfriendliness toward the Indians which was daily increasing the risks of the Vigo cargoes, the suffering but never wavering patriot saw that his bold plan could not indefinitely continue. America's staunchest friends in the Midwest left the Country during those years of official lack of comprehension: it was not that kind of an America they had meant to build. Even the Indians began frowning on Vigo: wasn't his much-boasted America going too far? Vigo had leaned heavily on them during those days of "all-American" planning, realizing that without their support the scheme could not possibly be carried out. It was bad enough that the Americans were giving the Red Men no presents, and also taking their lands away, piece-meal and wholesale: Vigo sensed that, if antagonized too much, the Indian, already a friend of the British, would also refuse to trade his pelts with the reluctantly Americanized French Canadians, reserving them all for British traders; and the United States, not strong enough to face a coalition of British, Indians, and settlers, would be wiped out from the Valley so brilliantly conquered.

The structure, personal and national, he had tried to build for the glory of America was

obviously disintegrating. Where could he turn for sympathy and support? Where were "his own folk"? Italy was too far; too many intervening bridges had been burned in Vigo's advance. Its nearest approach on this side of the vast Ocean was Vincennes. Ever and ever closer became his relations with that citadel of Canadian conservatism, whose Americanization had been Vigo's only fatherhood; until at last this eternally roaming Ulysses began to feel that not the Forest, fast becoming too civilized for him, but the little town founded by the Sieur de Vinsene and his "Carignans" was *home.*

CHAPTER VIII

Domesticating the Wanderer

I CANNOT help thinking that Vigo's brave attempts at becoming a normal citizen of American Vincennes, hold to a very poignant degree the element of pathos.

This is a very wicked statement, both in form and content: in form, because it has the audacity of starting a chapter with the first personal pronoun, supposed to be taboo in American biographies; in content, because whatever little fame Vigo achieved came to him through and by the admiring population of that historic little city, and the fate of a "patron saint" ought not to be pathetic. I maintain that I am right in both instances.

In the matter of form, anybody who is not a born hypocrite ought to see that it is far more modest to say *"I think* a domesticated Vigo is pathetic", than "A domesticated Vigo *is* pathetic"; yet false modesty makes the average biographer shun the pronoun "I" so sedulously, that he prefers to give as a positive fact something which he ought to suggest merely as a

personal hypothesis. As to eliminating the incriminated pronoun by the subterfuge of substituting for it such popular makeshifts as "it would appear", "one might say", "its seems safe to assert", and so forth, how contemptible that procedure appears to an honest man! How typical of the eternal pretense, of the desperate hunt for alibis from the unavoidableness of Reality which typifies the ultra-Nordic, ultra-Puritanical mentality holding sway in America when such rules of "literary propriety" were forced upon a reading public innocent of all knowledge of Continental European literature! It is only when one becomes personally acquainted with these apparently self-effacing biographers, that he can fully appreciate the irony of the retiring, humble ways of their literary style. For all more primitive peoples put on masks—ceremonial masks, Carnival masks—at some time or other; but the so-called "most advanced civilizations" shun them, for the simple reason that they wear them all the time.

And now turning from form to content, I also maintain, against any theoretical defender of domesticity, that it is nothing short of pathetic to watch poor Vigo trying so hard to

become a "conformist" in the city which opened wide her arms to him when he was in distress.

Vincennes herself was not to blame: far from it. The lovely little town built around the venerable chapel of "St. François Xavier au Poste Vinsene" was far-famed for her hospitality: "for many years after the Americans had taken possession of the country, there were no taverns, and the stranger within their gates was as much domiciled among them during his stay, as if he had been one of the family." (Judge Law). If that is the way the Vincennians behaved toward strangers, one can imagine how hard they would try to make Vigo feel at home. And he did, in a way, feel "at home" there: as much so, certainly, as this son of the Forest could ever feel in a town. Just *how much* that means, anybody who understands the feelings of an "Assumption of the Virgin" hanging on the walls of the Louvre, or of a Royal Bengal tiger anchored to the London Zoo, ought to appreciate. Personally, I surmise that the happiest moments which Vigo the Builder spent in Vincennes were those when he could smooth off some of the endless misunderstandings which arose between the early Canadian population and the Americans who so soon after Clark's

capture began to outnumber, outweigh, and outwit the original settlers. Misunderstandings, not quarrels; for the good-natured Canadians, although obstinate by instinct, gave their new masters less trouble than any other "French" community of the Midwest; either Vigo saw to it—he was speaking fluent English by this time, and divided his company pretty evenly between the French-speaking and the English-speaking population—or else those logical "Carignans" understood that once they let those irrepressible Americans in, they might as well *faire bonne mine à mauvais jeu.*

My "fair readers" will forgive me (I like the old term, which testifies to the fact that it took English literature about four hundred years to realize that not all women readers are fair, nor all men readers "unfair"), if I say that Vigo's greatest happiness in Vincennes must have come to him from his work as an Americanizer, although in Vincennes he also found that potential giver of supreme happiness, a wife. With men of Vigo's type—builders and pioneers—women come fatally after work, and not before. All those readers who objected on sentimental grounds to my treatment of the

Clark-de Leyba romance have nothing to fear here.

Vigo met the girl some little time after he had decided to make Vincennes his headquarters, and therefore while already on the leeward side of his middle age; and the uneventfulness of their wedded life ought to mean that they experienced marital contentment, even though no children arrived to knit more closely two persons who had come together from pretty distant spiritual *habitats*. That eternally roaming Ulysses found at Vincennes one who would prove his Penelope. Quartermaster Shannon, originally of George Rogers Clark's corps, had called his entire family from the East to the little capital on the Wabash; most of them were massacred by the Indians, but his daughter Elizabeth escaped; Vigo, who had come across few non-Latin girls in the course of his wandering life, "fell for her" and married her. Elizabeth Shannon was the only woman whom history has associated with Vigo; although an old negro servant of his, Toussaint Purrier, interviewed by the indefatigably inquisitive Dr. Draper, asserted to him that Vigo had been married twice. Servants are usually well-informed in such matters; but unfortunately Dr.

Draper—for once—investigated no further. Perhaps it was a case of the gentleman stealing a march on the scholar. (Journalists please note.)

Francis Vigo and the former Miss Shannon naturally set up a home—a most elaborate home—in Vincennes, which by that time already counted the Italian as easily its most prominent citizen.

But here beware, future historians of Vigo! *"Hic Rhodus, hic salta."* A trap is yawning for its prey as you prepare to relate that part of Vigo's life when his activities radiated from that lovely and loving Vincennes home. Yes, it was "the finest home in the Midwest", I know; and I also know all about the unheard-of luxury of its "floor laid in square blocks of white walnut and black oak in alternating rows", and about Governor (later President) William Henry Harrison declining Vigo's invitation to occupy that wonder among residences as too elegant for him, and finally settling down in just one section thereof. An elegant home, a loving wife totally unknown to history, and what you would call nowadays an "AAA" rating in Bradstreet's; what more could anybody want? Almost any biographer might be lured away

from the essentials in the life of his "quarry" by just such enticements. Why not? The war was over, the English had left for good: can't our hero settle down with his meerschaum, in frog-bedecked pajamas and soft slippers?

No, he can *not*: that is just it, oh bourgeois souls who glorify the commonplace as the ultimate ideal of our planet's noblemen, simply because your own fondest dream may be that of reaching the degree of comfort which causes any self-respecting cat to indulge in a subconscious purr. I am thoroughly convinced that Vigo was miserable as he trod over his "square blocks of white walnut and black oak", proud though he may have been that he gave his dear Vincennes a new wonder. And he probably would have run away, never to return, if he had read the Harrison incident related as follows:

> "This house was nearly completed when the owner learned of the coming of General William Henry Harrison, who had been appointed Governor of the Northwest Territory, with headquarters in Vincennes. 'I'll pay you twenty guineas premium if you will have the house completed when General Harrison reaches Vincennes,' he said to the builder. But when the offer of the complete house was made to the Governor, he refused

> to accept more than one room. 'Then he must have the best room in the house,' Mr. and Mrs. Vigo agreed; and Harrison was compelled to take the parlor." (John T. Faris, *"The Romance of Forgotten Men."*)

How very sweet: but for a flattening-out process, this beats any steam-roller. With all due respect for my hero, if Vigo were alive and his Indian friends still encamped within hailing distance of him, I would fear for Mr. Faris' scalp.

It is all a matter of perspective. If Vigo, instead of being a true candidate for immortality, were the Third Vice-President of the Society for the Preservation of the American Buffalo, or the Sergeant-at-Arms of the National Federation of Dahlia Growers' Associations, the domesticity-plus treatment of his life would be meritorious and becoming. But we are *not* dealing with an understudy, nor with one of the usual chesty pigmies; we are dealing with a real American martyr and prophet, both red-blooded and full-size. Why are his peace-time exploits not understood and appreciated?

The trouble is that wars have for so many centuries monopolized history, that just because Vigo had helped Clark take Vincennes, his-

torians saw in the burly Piedmontese mainly a sort of second-rate warrior, a kind of non-commissioned officer crawling behind a gallant Clark with raised sword in an "Onward Christian Soldiers" attitude; and this military version of Vigo's greatness brought with it the corollary that once Vincennes was conquered, Vigo, her leading citizen, could and should go fishing. Consequently, the tempo of the biographer slows down to an unalluring *andante moderato;* the reader yawns and turns out the light at the head of his bed, mumbling to himself: "A fine fellow he was, this man Vigo, but now I hope he dies soon." And the reader is quite right, because nine biographers out of ten kill the souls of their heroes long before joining the mourners, figuratively, around said heroes' graves.

Vigo was *not* a second-rate warrior: he was a first-rate patriot, who used alternately war and peace as tools. "Homme de ressource" he had been styled by Adjutant Major Delassize in New Orleans, and that is what he fundamentally remained all his life: "homme de ressource", diplomat, *Eminence Grise* who quietly and invisibly pulled to perfection the strings of all important events of at least one generation

in the Mississippi Valley; pulled them, mind you, not because of his being promised wealth or power, but out of a dogged determination to help his new Country, the United States of America, first against the British—as we have seen—and then against the formidable Indian Federation which would have pushed the Whites back to the Alleghanies, if allowed to gather momentum. I shall deal with this latter phase of Vigo's work later; but it is now, while I proclaim the essential greatness that was his at a time when no flare of trumpets celebrated his glory, that I want to call my readers' attention to the magnificent self-sacrifice of a Vigo who, left in the lurch by the United States, recoups his fortunes through trade with the Indians; but, seeing that the Red Men are about to humiliate those United States, chooses in favor of his political allegiance, and, suicidally as far as his own future is concerned, lays the groundwork for the definitive victory of the Whites, the crushing of the "Prophet" of the Indian Confederacy, the death of the brave Tecumseh at the River Raisin. The United States had won; and, forty years after Vigo's death, they will pay a Southern Indiana undertaker the sum of Twenty Dollars for the time

and labor involved in transporting Vigo's body to the humblest of graves in a funny little cart, still in existence a few years ago, used for paupers' funerals. Therein lies Vigo's true greatness: that pathetic *post mortem* ride is far more significant than his yearly Fourth of July rides at the head of the Vincennes parade, which could be duplicated almost anywhere in the Land. In full spirit of reverence let me recall to my readers how much more important for world history was Christ's ride into Jerusalem on the back of a patient donkey, than all the sumptuous processions in honor of the Man from Galilee which have taken place for centuries in Saint Peter's Square.

* * *

The Vincennians did what they could for Vigo; it was not their fault if he was living a far larger life than they could ever dream of. "In truth," wrote Governor St. Clair of the Northwest Territory, "Mr. Vigo, a gentleman of Vincennes, is the most distinguished person I almost ever saw." Imagine the surprise of the simple French Canadians and "Long Knives" when oil paintings, first of all a portrait of Thomas Jefferson, began to arrive into the Vigo home! Wooden mosaics in the pavement are

all right in their own way, but this Italian must also have real art. He now owned a yacht, and held the rank of Colonel in the First Regiment of Knox County Militiamen—the only colonel among all Latins in the Midwest of that day! He was elected a Trustee of the Vincennes Cathedral; he had been appointed a delegate to the celebrated Convention to define the status of slavery in Indiana, where the Son of the Forest must have felt horribly out of place, and wisely held his peace in the barrage of political oratory. That confidence in himself which the shy, self-conscious Vigo had always lacked, was at last being forced upon him by events; one cannot remain forever blind to his own merits when everybody else acknowledges them steadily by word or deed.

It was perhaps that increasing self-confidence which suggested to this man, forever dreaming of the welfare of the Valley from his Vincennes prison, a new scheme whereby he might yet revive the trade of America in that Midwest now hopelessly again out of the commercial control of the United States. If it was fated that England should monopolize the trade of that region, and that the Valley's apparently inexhaustible supply of pelts should take the route

of Detroit, Montreal, and London, why could not an American merchant, *establishing the proper connections with the British,* handle all the share of that trade which preceded the packing for ultimate shipping at Detroit? The United States would thus enjoy the double advantage of keeping most Britishers out of the Valley, and of showing to the Indians that the Americans and not the British were their customers. And that is why we find Vigo unexpectedly talking business possibilities with the leading Canadian merchants, and finally accepting the very responsible position of "Resident Partner", with headquarters in Vincennes, for the all-powerful Miami Fur Company, a Canadian, hence British, concern.

When every element in the transaction has been properly weighed, and the results have been made to yield their valuable testimony, the decision of this red-hot American to work *with,* although by no means *for,* the British, shows us not only an astute, but an even more admirable Vigo. His scheme for the Americanization of the Valley trade having been made impossible in the long run by the stupidity of those who ought to have co-operated with him from headquarters, there would appear to remain

open to him only two courses: either removing to Saint Louis, thence trading with New Orleans and Continental Europe, or settling in Detroit, last outpost of British fur trade, making amend for past Americanism, and gathering there from South and West furs to be routed to London via Montreal. Between the two horns of the dilemma, Vigo, as geniuses are wont to do, chose the third. He would connect with Detroit, but stay on American soil, develop the American trade, watch the Indians, and prevent, by his very presence, a number of Britishers from entering the Valley to carry on business, and indirectly, of course, to spy and make trouble.

It must be remembered that the admirably perfected Canadian Fur Trade was based upon four categories of people, living respectively in London, Montreal, Detroit, and the "Fur Country"; and that the first and the last were, if not always the most remunerative, at least the most risky and the most elastic. London dealt hand-in-glove with the Government: international policies were often reshaped through the insistence of this and that powerful concern, as is often done today to please steel or oil corporations; the London interests had un-

limited capital, skilled lobbyists; through them the furs, when finally reaching Europe, were sold at auction or distributed as far away as China. The "Fur Barons of Montreal" were mainly a score of canny Scots who, being told by London how to toe the mark in everything pertaining to Forts protecting their trade, to soft-pedal or *fortissimo* in their opposition to the Americans, and so on, acted, in the main, as long-time money lenders for Detroit and beyond, and as ocean shippers when the pelts had arrived at the Coast. Detroit (together with a host of less strategic points, such as Michillimackinac, Sandusky, etc.) was headquarters for the actual outfitters; hardly a hunter who brought his outfit from the East: clothing, boats with their *engagés,* merchandise were secured there, in sight of the half-charted beyond, exactly as Zermatt, Courmayeur, and Chamonix supply the alpinists about to ascend the Matterhorn and the Mont Blanc. But, just as in war time our friends from the Engineers, Aviation, and Artillery smoothed the way as well as they knew how for us poor infantrymen, yet the moment came when they could do no more and the rest of the job was left to the "Queen of Battles", so here the decisive rôle,

that of bringing or not bringing back the goods, was left to the real *pelt men,* usually a wintering ("Resident") partner for each firm, with a lot of satellites, less and less white-skinned as the commercial aspects of the fur trade vanished and the trapper's skill became paramount. These are the facts, over which Novelists, Poets, & Co. have embroidered so, that the canvas below has become well-nigh invisible. Vigo, as Resident Partner for the Miami Fur Company, was supposed to stay away from its headquarters in British Detroit and to do his entire work within the American zone, whence he would safely entrust the convoys to one of his lieutenants for the last leg of the journey. He could thus make Vincennes his headquarters.

For some few years this scheme worked well. Vigo spent more and more time in Vincennes, where he held to the baptismal font as godfather an incredibly large percentage of the population, ever watching and helping their progress in life as godfathers were originally intended to do. This is the easiest Vigo for us to visualize, human, lovable, witty, noisy, lowbrow, serene except when confronted with formality, sophistication, and deviousness. And François Bissot's "Poste" on the Wabash, now

a thriving city more ambitious and less happy than she had ever been, where saddened French Canadians and land-poor "Americans" managed to get along as close neighbors, was inordinately proud of her adopted son. First a street in Vincennes, then a near-by township, and finally a county in Indiana were named after him. He was a member of the first Board of Trustees of Vincennes University, the parent organization from which sprang the University of Indiana; he took a leading rôle in the movement which brought into being the first Free Library west of the Alleghany Mountains; his secretary was Paul Menard, who was later to become Lieutenant Governor of Illinois.

But, if he was increasingly respected and honored, Vigo was not as light-hearted as he appeared. Two problems weighed heavily on his mind: the Indian peril, and the re-imbursement of his advances to the Government, which had left him too short of cash for a prudent merchant.

This Piedmontese knew the Red Men better than any native American. Some of my readers will probably think I am over-drawing the picture. No, it was Major Doughty, the seasoned Indian fighter, who wrote once to the Secretary

of War: "All the Indians know Vigo and esteem him; his influence is greater amongst the Indians than any man I know of." Yet this was the time when the Indians had become so bold, that the population of Vincennes and other towns occasionally spent the night inside the Forts; Vigo meanwhile roaming securely among the Shawnees, Miamis, Pottawatomies, Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, Wyandots, Kickapoos, Ottowas, Winnebagoes, and a few other tribes! He knew that the safety of all those Western settlements was still precarious; that while the French, the Spanish, and the English, so far from headquarters, no longer constituted a danger for the United States, a war to the finish loomed inevitable between his Country, now sole White claimant to the land, and a coalition of all the Red Men finally brought together by the inescapableness of impending disaster. He also knew, alas, that just because he was so strong with the Indians he would again and again be compelled to intervene in their contests with the Whites, whose part he must take out of racial allegiance, against his own heart.

Hardly had Vigo settled down in Vincennes, when pressure began to be brought to bear upon him by his new fellow-countrymen to go among

the Indians and plead with them. Had he not already done enough for his adopted Land? Why didn't they leave him alone, to try and recoup his finances, never quite recovered after the Clark currency affair? If he must leave his new Vincennes home and his old Vincennes friends for the Forest, why not let him just trade with the Indians, without a thought of politics? No: he was still needed, he would be still needed for a quarter of a century! Great national figures like President Washington, Governor Harrison, Secretary Knox, and General Wayne urging him on, poor Vigo, like the proverbial war horse at the sound of the bugle, rises once more, and until there is nothing left in him to give and the battle of Tippecanoe has cleared the last obstacle in the path of a triumphant United States, he trails his increasingly rheumatic body over forest, swamp, and stream—listening, advising, reporting. "Brave, gentle, patriotic friend of Freedom", as Senator Voorhees labeled him.

Did Vigo become, then, just one more "Indian spy"? Nothing could be further from the truth. A spy pretends to be a friend and betrays friendship; a spy sells the information secured; a spy lies to his victims, and as often as not to

his employers also. Vigo's missions may have all been strictly secret, partly because his life was at stake, and partly because our Piedmontese, despite the Italian effervescence of his ways, belonged to that distinct class of men who love to be surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery, to keep people forever guessing, to arrive unheralded and to depart unnoticed; but there never was trickery behind those missions, as proven by the fact that he moved unarmed among the most belligerent tribes even when they were on the war path against the Whites, and as confirmed by the even more significant fact that his presence was tolerated and even requested at the Indian councils which were held regularly in the proximity of Vincennes every year. One day, long before this time, George Rogers Clark had asked him, half enviously and half admiringly, "What is the secret of your success with the Indians?" And Vigo replied: "The fact that never yet have I told a lie to an Indian." How much better than the usual alternating of wampum, rum, and bullets! It was more than a difference of policy, it was a difference of racial consciousness. 'Way back in the minds of all Americans from the East, who had lately emerged from a White Man's civilization, was

the feeling that a White Man's America was incompatible with the Forest and with its sons, the Red Men. Whereas Vigo was part and parcel of the Forest, and much as he admired the political creed of the rebellious Colonies, he felt an intimate attachment for his Red brothers. How he must have wished that Pilgrims and Cavaliers had landed elsewhere! Here is a subject fit for some new version of Galsworthy's "Loyalties". In practice, he seems to have taken a realistic attitude, saying to the Indians: "Never mind your grievances. As things stand, behave tolerantly toward the Whites, and there will be land enough for all; irritate them, and you will be made to pay heavily. And do not even think of forming an anti-White Confederation, or you will be wiped out altogether by the Pale Faces."

Whether this was actually the burden of the message which Vigo was asked by the Great President to deliver to some Indian tribes—the Choctaws and the Chickasaws—as "signed by him" in the fateful year of his inauguration, it would be risky to state. The words may have differed somewhat, since they were given in the name of the Great White Father, but Vigo's interpretation was sure to have brought them,

without involving higher responsibilities, inside the scope of the practical policy outlined above. In any case, it does seem indicative of the political flare of George Washington that when beginning to re-adjust and re-organize the Country still so shaky and unsettled, he should have summoned Vigo all the way to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to discuss from a number of angles the Indian situation which he was aware Vigo could handle with as much patriotism as any other American, and with infinitely greater safety than anybody else.

> "Mr. Vigo's security is entirely owing to the affection of the Indians, who all know him and esteem him . . . His influence is greater amongst the Indians than any man I know of, and it is always exerted for the interest of his Country."

Washington had made no mistake when he had chosen as his confidential man for work of persuasion among the Choctaws and Chickasaws a person so glowingly described by the chief Indian expert of the day, Major Doughty, in an official report to Secretary Knox.

At Washington's summons, Vigo rushed over to Carlisle accompanied by his favorite clerk, a young Canadian who had recently come down

from Montreal to Vigo's counting house at Vincennes: Pierre Menard, who later settled at Kaskaskia, and, by introducing there Vigo's system of keeping open house continuously for Whites and friendly Reds, became the most prominent citizen of Illinois. The outcome of the carefully guarded interview can best be studied "in the field", and it shows us Vigo working hand-in-glove with Major Doughty, being entrusted by him with all kinds of responsibility: Vigo's name appears at every turn in Doughty's reports to the War Department, and especially in the very detailed and impressive one, personally addressed to Secretary Knox, dated Kaskaskia, April 17, 1790. All in all, Vigo had so well fulfilled President Washington's every expectation, that Secretary Knox addressed to him, on June 20, 1790, a carefully worded but grateful letter, of the type that would make Vigo feel elated but would not expose him too much if intercepted:

"Sir:

Major Doughty has in expressed words given an account of the services which you have rendered him and the zeal which you have manifested for the United States in the difficult business which has been committed to your care. Your conduct therein, Sir, has

attracted the attention of the President, and I am directed by him to tender to you his acknowledgment thereof.

HENRY KNOX."

Pretty guarded talk, as anyone can see: George Washington, of his own initiative, gratefully "acknowledges" Vigo's conduct in some "difficult business" which had been "committed to his care" (by whom? by President Washington, or Major Doughty? The wording seems purposely sybilline). But it was the most which a President could say, given the nature of that "business", and the fact that the English were notoriously sympathizing with the Indians. Even plain army officers did not dare to be much more explicit, as can be seen by perusing the Harmar MSS. in the Draper collection:

"Major Hamtramck to General Harmar:

Post Vincennes, August 17, 1789.

The Shawanese [Shawnees] who are in the Mississippi might be brought to our side. Mr. Vigo can tell you how that is. I am, dear General, etc.

J. F. HAMTRAMCK."

Quietly, unobtrusively, Francis Vigo kept on interrupting his mercantile pursuits to preach

peace and resignation to the Indians. Yet the man who had directly brought about the victory of Vincennes in 1779, was to prepare indirectly the victory of Tippecanoe in 1811; not with the same technique, to be sure, but by applying himself indefatigably to the prevention of the great Indian Federation which would have turned that victory into a defeat.

However, the danger of that coalition was still fairly remote during the last decade of the century, a decade which opens on a Francis Vigo immensely popular in Vincennes, extremely ambitious in his mercantile pursuits, and happy in the sight of the consolidation of Americanism in the heart of the Continent. The last transaction arising from the de Leyba will was a thing of the past, the bad money of Colonel Clark was no longer adversely affecting his trade, the Valley could not be bottled up while he was able and willing to keep open the lines of trade communication either with the American East (which he still did whenever he got a chance), or with Canada: Pittsburgh or Detroit.

Yet what a danger he ran—danger of being steadily misunderstood by both Canadians and Americans! Distances seem made on purpose for misunderstandings; and Canadian as well

as American headquarters were pretty far away from Vincennes. The few "big men", both Canadian and American, who had an opportunity of seeing Vigo at work in his habitat were loud in his praise; but they were neither the Montreal Fur Barons on whom Vigo was, in the last analysis, financially dependent, nor the Washington authorities who were still "studying" the claims arising from the George Rogers Clark loans of cash and supply of provisions.

The Canadians were to wreck him first. They were not to blame, far from it; business being so thoroughly interwoven with politics, the wonder is that they had ever agreed to make use of Vigo at all. Probably, had there been anybody else in the Valley who knew pelts, folk, and languages from New Orleans to Michillimackinac and Pittsburgh as well as the "Spanish Merchant", they would never have made business overtures to him; but he seemed unreplaceable. An ideal business associate, but a potential political enemy: that is what Vigo was; both Montreal and Detroit knew it well. And, if they did not actually know it, they could easily guess that he and his agents did not discover one thing of political import in the Wilderness that did not end at American Head-

quarters. From this period are two Vigo documents, preserved in the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, which I consider quite illuminating. One is a letter by our hero, signed with his characteristically uncouth VIGO, and the other is an enclosure of great importance which reads as follows:

> "The express which was sent by the Commanding Officer of this place to Detroit returned a few days ago, and brings information that the British have made great preparations there to defend themselves against the United States. We are informed from New Madrid that there is three galleys and three Galliats at that place from New Orleans, commanded by a Mr. Rausseau."

With that enclosure went a signed note: "Extract from a letter from a Gentleman of undoubted Carracter (*sic*) in St. Louis, dated May 6, 1794, to Francisco Vigo of this town."

As to the other document, one sentence thereof will be sufficient for our purposes:

> "It must be observed that the gentleman who wrote VIGO has his reasons for not more fully explaining himself, as his property is considerable, and in the British possession."

Now, a huge wilderness being probably second only to a self-contained Convent or College in volume of gossip, it can be readily surmised that the Canadians suspected what was going on; and they must have begun to count the cost of their partnership with the man from Vincennes. Other persons than Vigo could probably force a way for British goods upon the New Orleans market; other persons than Vigo might be able to "persuade" the Governor of Upper Louisiana to disregard the law which forbade British goods to descend the Mississippi south of Saint Louis. In any case, Canada could not afford to associate further with this dubious foreigner who could not even be asked into Detroit for explanations without incurring the risk of his being put in jail. But, always diplomatic, the British killed Vigo with his own weapons; they loaned him considerable money (how he wished he had the Clark money instead!) to be repaid in furs, and when the furs arrived they were not credited against his loans on the specious pretext that they were unfit for the London market, whither all Canadian furs ultimately drifted! We still have the letter which the Montreal "Fur Barons" Todd & McGill sent to John Askin of Detroit on this transaction:

> . . . "We cannot help taking nottice to you of this apparently inferior quality. . . . A Battoe load of them is not worth the expense of sending for them to St. Dusky [Sandusky] . . . Tho mostly in good season, they [the skins] are exceedingly unfit for the London Market, owing to the manner in which they were stretched; and although Mr. Vigoe may be of the opinion that the Skins are not the less good, we can assure you that their value is much inferior at that Market by which we must all be regulated."

And poor Vigo could not even go to Canada to protest to the authorities against the outrage: they would land him in jail, or worse. He had tried to go to Detroit once, on business, in 1784; recognized by one of Gen. Hamilton's lieutenants, he was arrested and then released under a bond of several thousand pounds, from which he later freed himself with considerable difficulty. All he could do in this new predicament was to ask for more time, and yet more time in which to repay the Canadian advances, hoping that meanwhile the United States would repay *his own* advances. He could not even turn for assistance to either one of the two men who, whether they had remained loyal to the American cause or not, had at least been prominent

associates of his in early Kaskaskia and Vincennes days: Clark and Gibault. They were both penniless at this time, for taking America's promises at their face value! "I have given the United States half the territory they possess, and for them to suffer me to remain in poverty, in consequence of it, will not redound much to their honor thereafter", were Clark's strong, but fully justified words. For more than five years, in which he served first as Colonel and then as Brigadier General, he had been unable to draw his pay. "We think you may safely confide in the Generosity of the Virginia Assembly", had been Jefferson's *envoi,* pregnant with glittering promise, to the young Colonel when he set forth for the Conquest of the Valley! And now, the secret committee of Congress, consisting of Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris, and Richard Henry Lee, while recognizing Clark's claims, sacrifices, and faithfulness to duty, "were unable to make good any promises" (James Alton James). How strange to see, as I write (1932), the same American Government so unwilling to waive aside its credits against a half-starved Europe on the ground of *sacredness of obligations!* The difference between being a creditor and being a debtor seems

to affect considerably the logic of an obligation.

And if Clark could write to Pollock that he was not "worth one Spanish dollar", and to General Harrison, most pitifully, "I can assure you, Sir, that I am exceedingly distressed for want of necessary clothing", Father Gibault was not faring much better. He also had been enmeshed in the Clark currency *débâcle,* and apparently quite heavily, if we are to believe the "Pro-Memoria" he sent to General St. Clair, on May 1, 1790, from his new parish of Cahokia:

> "The undersigned, memorialist, has the honor to represent to Your Excellency that . . . he sacrificed his property . . . at the same price that he could have received in Spanish milled dollars, and for which, however, he has received only paper dollars (Continental Currency) . . . The want of seven thousand eight hundred livres, of the non-payment of which the American notes has deprived him the use (*sic*), has obliged him to sell two good slaves, who would now be the support of his old age, and for the want of whom he now finds himself dependent on the public. . . ."

But all that poor slaveless Gibault got were the public thanks of Virginia, as benefactor of

the Commonwealth, and, *for his Church,* a lot of Cahokia land which he proceeded to appropriate for his personal use, trusting that his superiors in distant Quebec would not hear of it. (People more clever than Gibault have been similarly deluded!)

No, Vigo could only rely upon himself and upon time. Happily, as Stevens says in his admirable *The Northwest Fur Trade,* "almost every step in the fur trade process was based upon long time credit." Yet time was beginning to be unkind to Vigo, who did not become a real "fur man" until his advanced middle age. To be a Wintering Partner required a hardiness usually accompanied by youth—not to speak of the fact that Italy, Spain, Cuba, and New Orleans are too languorously Southern and sunny to supply the right beginning for a career centering in the woods of the far from tropical region that is now Indiana and Illinois. Finally, in 1802, Vigo, then fifty-five, experienced a protracted and severe illness, which held his active body helpless for a long time. It was the beginning of his unmaking, both physical and financial. A few months later, he was up and about again, but he was not quite the same man, although he acted as gamely as could have been

expected. Oh, why, *why* didn't the United States, now rich, repay their obligation to this man crippled in their service? The law of the Wilderness allowed elastic credits, but was hard on the well-to-do debtor not coming across when the creditor was in distress. How did it happen that the Vigo claims were repaid only one century after the loans had been made? Let us leave to lawyers the technical analysis of their status, which makes them *une cause célèbre,* and proceed by synthesis instead in trying to fathom the motives and to reconstruct the precedents of what appears to be a case of gross criminal negligence.

* * *

In the first place, Vigo's claims were exactly of the type which looks suspicious until fully investigated. Clark was the soldier, Pollock the fiscal agent, Gibault the Canadian and the priest —most useful in the Valley populated by Canadian Catholics. Their claims, poorly though they fared, would appear more impellent than Vigo's. Who was this Italian, this man without a Country, who had come to interfere in the already over-complex international checkerboard of the Valley? A Government must have an individual properly pigeonholed before his voice can

be heard; having been in the employ of no less than five Departments or Ministries (three American and two Italian) during the five years of the World War, I have learned not a little about bureaucratic mentality—the only really international item in the running of our planet's great political units! This insistence upon definite classification is best exemplified by the story of the brave Frenchman who had taken part in several historic hand-grenade attacks without ever being rewarded, either because all his witnesses had been killed or else because he advanced with a unit other than his own; he was so disgusted that he turned his back on the foe, trying to reach the safety of the rearguards—only to find that the enemy was about to do away with his regiment by a surprise attack from the rear; he was immediately taken prisoner, and soon received a gold medal from the French Republic for "having endeavored, all alone, to stem the onslaught of over ten thousand Germans who were surreptitiously advancing from an unexpected direction." That time the soldier had accomplished something *which could be exactly classified!*

The ordeal which Vigo underwent when trying to collect was cruel, but logical. "We

are compelled to turn down even the claims advanced by the original Canadian owners of Vincennes, and by the American soldiers and settlers there: how can we entertain those of a foreign dealer in military stores? Such people are notoriously a shady lot of individuals, at best." One can easily visualize what happened at the Capital whenever the Vigo claims came up. "Who is this man Vigo?" "A Spanish merchant; but we need not worry about Spain interfering: he proclaims himself a loyal American, so we are safe no matter how we deal with him." "Good. Get all his letters and reports accompanying this claim, please." "There are none; this fellow can't even write." "Oh, these foreigners! And what did he ever do?" "He helped take Vincennes." "Then he must have been given his thousands of acres of land in that district: you know how those boys helped themselves there." "No, his name did not appear in the lists of Clark's raiders." "Worse yet; he sent others to slaughter, and stayed quietly at home. What part is he supposed to have taken in the Vincennes campaign?" "He went ahead as a spy." "Then he must have been paid at the time like all spies." "No, he was paid nothing, yet he demands no payment for

that. But as the right-hand man of Colonel Clark . . ." "Why, Clark has since become a subject of the King of Spain, and is under suspicion of high treason. This Spanish merchant Vigo looks like a dubious character. What does he do now?" "He is reported as being the only White friend of all the Indians." "Worse yet! Who wants to pay a lot of money to *'a friend of all the Indians'?* The Indians have given us enough trouble as it is." "It is claimed that it was Vigo's diplomacy at Vincennes which saved the day . . ." "Well, when did the United States ever have a diplomatic representative at the court of General Hamilton?" "He is the only merchant who endeavored to tie up the Atlantic with the Gulf and the Lakes in an all-American net of trade . . ." "Excellent! There should be money in that, and as long as he does not ask us for favors, let us hope he makes a success of it. As for his claims on *us,* he can wait a little longer. Who is next?"

After all, there was very little money to go around, and Vigo's claim was large, and a number of years had passed between benefactions and consideration of the case; all elements adversely affecting the decision, irrespective of its wording. The technical point often raised (as I

explained in an earlier chapter) was that Vigo's written claim, personally and formally filed as requested, was entered some time after the expiration of the time limit set by the Government, although this was waived in a number of cases, and Vigo, living in the Wilderness and working there for the American "Rebels", had a better alibi than anybody else. But the main trouble was that Vigo had loaned his money and goods to *Virginia,* that Virginia turned over to *the United States* both her newly conquered territory and the cost of its acquisition; and that the "beneficiary", beset by all sorts of vague and exorbitant claims against the "donor"—claims which were increasingly difficult to pass upon—tried to settle everything by a hard-and-fast budget allowance of half a million dollars for all claims, including the one of Vigo, of course. Then came the usual grand race, on the part of claimants, for inclusion; on the part of judges, for exclusion. 'Twas ever so.

What did the total of Midwest claims finally entered amount to? It is next to impossible to estimate it; just as it is next to impossible to figure the value of what was ultimately granted, since the scarcity of actual money suggested recourse to all sorts of compromises: claimants were paid in slaves, tobacco, and land near and

far, good, bad, and indifferent, some of it clearly within the right of the donor to give, some still subject to dispute: what a Paradise for lawyers this fluid Country has always been!

It is an axiom that where abuses exist, the honest fellow has to pay for the crookedness of the dishonest one. And if the entire Court of Justice of Vincennes was found to be so corrupt when its land grants were finally exposed that Governor Harrison had to thunder out, "The Official Seal of this Territory shall not be prostituted to a purpose so base as that of assisting an infamous fraud", it follows as a corollary that the officials who, back in Washington, were to pass upon Vincennes claims, had become, by sheer force of circumstances, a pretty "hard-boiled" lot. Poor Vigo's chances were slim indeed, although by this time he had again been caught in the meshes of Indian work in favor of the United States, and his no longer very resistent frame was hard tested by life among the savages.

What appears so strange in the legal history of the Vigo claims is that they were never definitely turned down, but they dragged along endlessly, taking the time of officials, and therefore the money of tax-payers, for three generations.

This is to me an almost unbearable aspect of governmental machinery, and it seems to be a world-wide scandal: the apparent impossibility of making public offices businesslike. A child knows that it is cheaper to pay two cents for what may be a skimpy two-cent lolly-pop, than to take a taxi to a distant store where one-cent lolly-pops are sold: but a grown-up official doesn't. The cable lines and the long-distance telephones are congested with official messages that would never have been deemed worth the cost of transmission by an honest firm which tries to pay dividends at the end of the year. Not so with Governments: if their cost grows higher, and officials do not know how to stop their squandering, a balancing of budgets is carried out through the doubling of taxation instead of the halving of official staffs—a halving which it might be wiser to perform not on the *whole staff,* but individually, through the waist line of each official thereof.

Dragging on until 1876, those Vigo advances involved the time and effort of a large number of salaried "stewards of the people", high and low, interested in the legality of the claim, the amount of the obligation, the machinery of its repayment, the character of the creditor: natu-

rally, Vigo's ever more pressing needs were never taken into account, nor the fact that Death was obviously stalking their prospective beneficiary. The human element? No, *"nous avons changé tout cela"*, as in Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire*. "The ethics of the profession come first", as the nurse is reported to have said when a woodsman, rushed to the hospital for serum treatment after being bitten by a rattlesnake, died before he had finished answering all questions about sex, age, color of hair, and religious preferences, for the proper filling of the Admission Blank. Oh, for a return to elementals!

Official Washington could not *really* need to question Vigo's character after the truly magnificent tribute with which President Harrison, trying to put an end to the outrage, answered the query:—

> "I have been acquainted with Colonel Francis Vigo of Vincennes for thirty-nine years. I lived in the same house with him, and upon terms of the most intimate friendship. I have often heard him speak of the draft which had been given to him by General Clark for supplies furnished to the Army, and that it had never been paid. With respect to the credibility of Colonel Vigo's statement, I solemnly

> declare that I believe him utterly incapable of making a misrepresentation of the facts, however great may be his interest in the matter; and I am also confident that there are more respectable persons in Indiana who would become the guarantors of Colonel Vigo's integrity, than could be induced to lay under a similar responsibility for any other person. His whole life, as long as his circumstances were prosperous, was spent in acts of kindness and benevolence to individuals; and his public spirit and attachment to the institutions of our Country are proverbial."

What a superb appreciation of the humble Piedmontese! President Harrison's letter shows not only admiration for him, but contempt for those who must have questioned the veracity of some of the statements made by Vigo in his long Memorandum requesting re-imbursement. What was sure to irritate most the Washington officials who had to pass on those statements must have been Vigo's lack of servility—government employees everywhere delighting in the servility of suppliants—and his insistence upon the fact that not one penny of the amount of his claims was for services, although such services he considered decisive and stated so in unmistakable terms:

> . . . "Your Memorialist has not asked for, nor received any compensation for his own services; though he is warranted in saying, and the history of the times will prove it, that but for his own personal services, at great risk and hazard to himself, Colonel Clark never would have been enabled to surprise Hamilton and the garrison at Vincennes."

And Secretary Knox bore out this version of the Vigo contribution by personally writing to the Committee: "So far as his *services* were concerned, he was amply rewarded by the good they had accomplished, and the approbation they had received from the public functionaries of the day." All of which meant that after all, even if the Government paid Vigo's claim in full, it would only terminate a long-drawn business transaction, and the item of gratitude toward this weird foreigner would be still left out of the calculations! "It would cost us a lot of money, and he would not even have to say 'Thank you'." Governments hate such situations; and the democratic American Government, being unable to square up the account by sending along with the check the insignia of Knighthood of the Purple Lizard, or the Cross of Grand Officer of the Order of the Golden

Hippopotamus, is more embarrassed in similar contingencies than its aristocratic fellow-sufferers of the Old World.

At one time, payment on one of the Vigo notes, for a figure in the neighborhood of $8000, was offered on condition that he would accept it *as is,* for the principal only, without the accumulated interest spreading already over a good third of a century—an amount of interest which Vigo the merchant knew to be, in the most unfavorable of cases, far larger than the principal—and would sign a receipt in full for all other claims. Poor though he was by that time, he indignantly refused. No benighted savage had ever tried to strike so sharp a bargain with him! Some years later, urged on by real need, he seems to have sold that same note to a private individual for only twenty per cent of its value; yet I am sure he never regretted his earlier refusal. This later transaction was a private bargain with a third party, and there was no principle at stake; but he was not going to be "done" by a Country, now extremely wealthy, of which he had been one of the chief makers. He did not want to be treated as a nuisance to be kept quiet: he was a patriot and a merchant; as a patriot his strenuous services

were always given free; as a merchant, he must be treated as honorable merchants treat others and expect to be treated themselves. The ball started rolling again. Seven times a Committee in the House of Representatives reported in favor of payment. Twice bills providing funds passed the House. The United States Senate in turn considered bills reported out of Committee, but they failed to go through. The "Vigo Claims" were soon to become a proverbial legal case, keeping alive, in connection with a record-breaking interweaving of mishandling and sluggishness, a name which should have achieved immortality for much worthier reasons.

CHAPTER IX

Indian Summer

THE epic days of Vincennes were over. Slowly, imperceptibly, the former tiny Capital of a French Catholic empire was becoming just one more of a number of frontier towns of the fast expanding American Commonwealth, although for a decade or two the ebb which followed the great flow of immigration and sophistication of the seventeen-eighties was hardly apparent. In fact, the city was continuing to grow, if not in character and prestige and charm, at least in number of inhabitants; and all growing human units, whether they be cities or countries, are apt to forget that any advance which is slower than that of their competitors is really a retreat.

It took Vincennes a long time to realize that she was being mercilessly uncrowned by her neighbors: communities not even born during that eighteenth century within whose brief limits had blossomed the whole romance of her own rise and fall. In 1817, Terre Haute, now

the capital of the County named after Vigo, was founded, her comparatively high ground being loudly praised by the soldiers who had often found there a refuge from the all-sweeping "ague". In 1818, after a new "purchase" from the Indians (how many of those transactions would now be held valid in Court, if the Whites had been the victims thereof?), the central part of the State was opened for colonization; and on the 8th of June, 1820, it was formally decided to build there the Capital of Indiana. In October and November, 1821, lots in the chosen spot were sold for a total of $35,000, and thus Indianapolis, so named by one Jeremiah Sullivan, came into being. Great oaks from little acorns grow.

That was the *coup de grâce* for Vincennes. In the same year 1821, the industrial pride of the town, her steam mill, largest in the State, was burned down. Yellow fever came, via the South, to add one more curse. So many taxes remained unpaid that the General Assembly petitioned Congress not to prosecute Vincennians for such violations. The "Western Sun" described conditions as follows:

> "A few years past Vincennes was the very emblem of prosperity; every wind wafted her

> some good. Our houses were filled with inhabitants, our streets were crowded with citizens, the noisy hum of business resounded in our ears. All was life and activity. How sadly is the picture reversed! More than one-third of our dwelling houses are destitute of inhabitants, our population has decreased nearly or quite one-half . . . An universal despondency prevails."

Only one bright spot remained in that picture of desolation: the Indians, as time advanced, dwindled down to insignificant numbers and to a position of utter hopelessness. How different from the earlier days of Vincennes, when the half-choked cry "The Indians are coming!" would spread terror throughout the town, and as often as not send its entire population within the walls of the best Fort in the Valley! Yet, how often that cry of alarm must have been followed by the re-assuring sentence, "Vigo is here—we are safe!" For Vigo was the best pal of the very humblest and filthiest of well-behaved Red Men, but was inflexible with them when they lost their heads. Father Gibault once wrote to his Bishop that a number of Whites had been killed by the Indians under his very eyes; yet the same Indians would never dare kill a White in the presence of Vigo, who might

not again smooth in favor of their race the sharp edges of the White Man's law, or plead for help to this and that starving tribe during a particularly severe season.

Yet throughout this period, still within the *grand siècle* of the historic town, when Vigo stood between Indian raids and his American Vincennes, he knew that at best the "peace" established between the United States and the aborigines in the middle eighties, and broken only by minor military events, was only an armed truce. As for himself, he only hoped—against hope—that he might, as a staid Vincennes merchant, be allowed to keep out of it all as an active participant; unless, of course, the British should start meddling again in strictly American affairs, or the Indians should form a Federation for the expulsion (*lege* general massacre) of all the Whites in the Midwest. To any appeal against those two dangers he could never be deaf.

And the appeal came, faint and indirect at first. General Wayne, the new Commander-in-chief of American operations in the Wilderness, on May 27, 1794, broke the ice with a very diplomatic and appreciative letter: Vigo being known to him as "a gentleman of integrity and

influence, and a sturdy and firm friend of the United States, and perfectly acquainted with all the trading people passing between Post Vincennes and Detroit, as well as from Saint Louis and Cahokia to that place", would he be good enough to endeavor to secure one or two trusty people to go to Roche du Bout, "to discover what number of British troops are there"? Good-bye, neutral days for Vigo! His reply is another of the treasures of the Pennsylvania Historical Society:

> "The business of the express mentioned in your letter, is now on foot, and in the hands of one of the best men in the United States for performing a business of that nature; he is daily expected at this place; and I am sure, if it is in the power of any single man to perform that business, he will do it. . . ."

Vigo was caught in the mesh again. The letter continues at length, conveying political news and gossip, dealing with international changes which had been or were taking place in the Valley. This time the old war-horse had heard the bugle only too well! The history of the middle nineties, leading to the Battle of Fallen Timbers, where the desperately fighting Indians were scattered by General Anthony Wayne on

August 20, 1794, shows Vigo again hopelessly caught in the intricate network of "Indian work". Furthermore, history ever repeating itself, when General Wayne on the following year found himself in a quandary, being unexpectedly left without any cash for the payment and provisioning of his expeditionary force, Vigo, unable to withstand the humiliation of America which he felt was a personal challenge, dug once more into his pocket, and—against such a precedent in his life as he was not likely to have forgotten—acted as banker again. This time the money was refunded without delay; but, even so, it had been a pretty gallant deed on Vigo's part. He simply could not refrain from helping the United States whenever he saw that he had the physical possibility of doing so. The colossal "luck" which has accompanied the quick and solid construction of this stupendous Country has not been due to the torpid masses whom democracies delight to honor, but, to a great extent at least, to the vigilant devotion of a sprinkling of people like Vigo.

For over a decade after the Battle of Fallen Timbers, Indian affairs were pretty quiet on the surface. It was clear to the initiated that they could not continue so. The new century

had found the British danger diminishing, the Indian danger correspondingly increasing. This was logical, because the Red Men, perceiving that their British friends were no longer able or willing to do as much for them as they had hoped, and that no one Indian tribe could curb the Whites, were bound to resort to the only means which still offered a chance of checking the advance of the Whites: Federation. A great warring tribe must be found to take the leadership, producing a military genius of the first rank, and animating the others through a lofty spiritual force of "supernatural" origin. The early years of the 19th century found such a tribe in the Shawnees, such a genius in Tecumseh, such a spiritual force in "the Prophet". Every American schoolboy knows of the great Indian Confederacy advocated by these two Shawnee brothers who were respectively the mystic soul and the unconquerable body of the revolt against the Pale Faces. But few of them, if any, know that the forested plain just across the Wabash from Vincennes had become at the turn of the century—for a number of reasons to which Vigo was not extraneous—the council ground where all Nations of Indians living between the Ohio and the Great Lakes gathered

each year to make their treaties and to transact all necessary business. There was inducement enough to bring even a convalescent, or, at best, a none too robust Vigo into the struggle once more, as soon as the plans for an Indian Confederation began to assume definite shape. Well above sixty, Vigo plunged again into the work of preventing, or at least retarding, the amalgamation of the tribes, although the savages were getting into an ugly mood, and Vigo's activities in the Wayne campaign could not have failed to displease them. It was risky, unremunerative, physically destructive work for a man tortured by rheumatic ills. But his Country needed him; and had not Fate chosen his own Vincennes as the place where he could periodically see all the braves whom he would leisurely visit in their forest homes at a later time? He was unreplaceable; he could not escape that call to duty. He started making the rounds, beginning with the Delawares, the Pottawatomies, the Miamis. That most illuminating newspaper, the *Western Sun* of Vincennes, which began publication as early as 1803, announced in its issue of July 21, 1810:

> "The Editor has obtained the following information:—Colonel Vigo, who was sent by the

> Government on a mission to the Miamis, returned on Saturday last. He states that that tribe (with the exception of one chief), the Delawares, and the greater part of the Pottawatomies, continue faithful to the United States. They had been apprised of the hostile intention of the Prophet, and the Delawares had remonstrated against it. The Miamis too had become so sensible from the Colonel's representations that they may be involved in the chastisement which the United States may inflict on the Prophet and his adherents should they commence hostilities, that they are determined to unite their whole exertions to those of the other tribes friendly to the United States to break up that formidable *banditti* which the Prophet, aided by British influence, has collected on the Wabash."

But despite the ubiquitousness and persuasiveness of the fast-aging Vigo—who was now sixty-three—the Prophet's plan gathered such momentum, that soon neither Vigo nor anyone else could stop the course of events; hastened, it must be admitted, by a certain type of White settler, administrator, and warrior, who felt that the Indians might be more at his mercy in the future if they would only unite as enemies, and then and there be smashed all together by the superior weapons of the civilized man. Oh

cruel, monstrous history of colonization, which shows man proceeding with the Cross of the gentle Christ in one hand, and the rifle and jug of rum in the other!

August came, and with it Governor Harrison's demand that Tecumseh meet him at Vincennes and put all his cards on the table. The great warrior arrived accompanied by a picked lot of seventy Chiefs. The historic meeting, so graphically reported by Judge Law who witnessed it as a mere boy, practically started the hostilities: Harrison having begun by stating that the White Man had ever acted honorably toward the Indian—a dangerous introduction, always avoided by Vigo—he was interrupted by Tecumseh yelling "You are a liar!" Barron, the interpreter, tried to moderate the import of the phrase; Tecumseh, knowing enough English to realize what Barron was doing, insisted upon a word-for-word translation. What a tense moment! The whole Vincennes population was present; they knew English, they knew Shawnee: their American Governor had been insulted most atrociously by a savage, in the presence of the whole community. General Gibson, Secretary of the Territory, ordered the troops which were stationed right and left of

the Gubernatorial *dais* to shoulder arms and advance. The seventy-one Indian dignitaries stood rigidly their ground, like statues. Harrison rose and declared the conference ended. Everybody went his way, knowing full well that that bloodless day was the prelude of a most bloody era.

At the meeting, which he sensed would be stormy, Vigo did not appear: his heart in tumult, his ideas of right and wrong fighting with his realization of the inevitable, his passionate allegiance cruelly pitted against his economic future, he kept away from his Indian friends, from his White countrymen. He knew that the meeting was a prelude to a racial war to the finish; that at best, he also—at the drawing of the color lines which is inevitable when men are facing elementals—would, as a White Man, appear to his life-long Indian friends as one more of the intruders who had come from another Continent to take away their Land; whereas he was, and would forever remain, something basically different from Anglo-American, French Canadian, and Spaniard, from soldier and explorer and trapper, in short from every damaging and constraining form of a *label*. Who was he, what was he, this Pied-

montese frontiersman, who witnessed the last days of his wilderness, the last days of his savages, the last days of his fur-bearing creatures in a Midwest now so hopelessly tame? He was an entity by himself, a polyglot and uprooted human phenomenon who knew forests like a Red Man and practiced trade like other White Men, only more efficiently; the child of a sunny, ancient, un-strenuous little Italian town, who had embraced aggressive Americanism against the political creeds of Spain, England, and the Forest Primæval, not because of this or that principle of government, but because his rugged, peasant-like common sense told him that the White Americans were ultimately bound to rule America, for the two all-sufficient reasons that a rich new country cannot indefinitely be governed from afar, and that the civilized fatally squeezes out the uncivilized. In the long run, these simple Americans who see in the Flag not a superhuman gift of the Almighty to His favorite offspring, but an honest stretch of red white and blue wool, cotton, or silk, give much better value to their Country than those who so snobbishly rationalize the making of the great American Commonwealth; they certainly avoid the ordeal of being brought down

to earth by something or somebody one fine day, to take their places side by side with other finite, imperfect human beings, also—strange to say—beloved of the Lord.

The last of Vigo's efforts had failed; he went no more among the Men of the Forest, who had disregarded his unselfish advice. A few months later, at Tippecanoe, the great Indian Confederation was shattered, the few survivors starting drearily their trek toward compulsory new homes in the West.

* * *

But when the Battle of Tippecanoe was over, and the fate of the Red Man was sealed, and those who had won the victory were hailed as heroes while those who had prepared it were conveniently forgotten, Vigo, then a private gentleman, a patient creditor, and an Indian trader left without Indians to trade with, heard that his old friend George Rogers Clark, whom the jealousy of others and his own impulsiveness had kept under a cloud since the triumphant days of the Vincennes conquest, had been routed from his quiet Kentucky retreat by the entire population of that community on the last Fourth of July—anniversary also of his taking of Kaskaskia—and given a tumultuous mani-

festation of patriotic gratitude. Memories in common, sorrow in common, passionate attachment to an America inherited by the one, embraced by the other, also in common. Outdoing himself, the almost septuagenarian Vigo despatched to Clark the famous letter, flowing with the milk of human kindness, which is justly the best known of all Vigo documents:

"Sir:

Permit an old man, who has witnessed your exertions in behalf of your Country in its revolutionary struggles, to address you at the present moment. When viewing the events which have succeeded those important times, I often thought that I had reasons to lament that the meritorious services of the best patriots of those days were too easily forgotten, and almost taxed my adopted Country with ingratitude. But when I saw that on July 4th last the citizens of Jefferson County from a spontaneous impulse of gratitude and esteem had paid an unfeigned tribute to the Veteran to whose skill America and Kentucky owe so much, I then repelled the unwelcome idea of national ingratitude, and my sentiments chimed in unison with those of the worthy citizens of Kentucky toward the saviour of this once distressed Country. Deprived of the pleasure of personal attendance on that day, I took this method of manifest-

ing to you, Sir, that I participated in the general sentiments. Please, Sir, to accept this plain but genuine offering from a man whom you honored once with your friendship, and who will never cease to put up prayers to Heaven that the evening of your days may be serene and happy.

VIGO."

To which Clark replied with another celebrated epistle:

"Sir:

A letter from a man who has always occupied a distinguished place in my affection and esteem must insure the warmest and most cordial reception—an affection, the result not so much of being associates in the placid stream of tranquillity and the benign sunshine of peace, as companions amidst the din of war and those struggles when the indefatigable exertion of every muscle and nerve was demanded. But it may be enough to remark that while the one is the effect of your uniformly discreet and irreproachable conduct in the intricate path of life, the other is wrought by a strong sense of that gratitude due from your adopted Country—having myself both witnessed and experienced the signal advantages flowing to our common Country from your inestimable conduct, and, what is more enhancing to such services, having ren-

dered them at a time when the cloud on which our fate hung, assumed a most menacing aspect.

When I contemplate the glowing affection with which your letter is fraught, and only a revival of such as you in past times (ah, better times, troublous as they were!) were wont to evince from me, I am so filled with correspondent feelings that I am at a loss for words to express them. How happy would I be, could those sentiments of entreaty to a trustful Providence, in the conclusive part of your letter, for 'a serene and happy evening', be realized. But that Providence (submitting as I do with manly patience to His decrees) has long since denied me that boon. He has cut asunder life's tenderest string.

GEO. R. CLARK."

And now, Kind Reader, forget for a moment writers and consignees of those letters, and, remembering only the expressive if florid style, turn your mind out of sheer contrast upon the *débâcle* of contemporary epistolary interchanges. A semi-illiterate foreigner and a backwoods soldier-adventurer exchanged such letters in those days! And today, the King of Soda Crackers and the Czar of Heterodyne do not know how to accept in writing a plain dinner invitation if their secretaries are in the hall powdering their noses. America's "Big

Men", left to their own resources, would spell *Dere Mable* as in the famous war-time book, while our ineffable Ph.D.'s have not yet discovered the difference between *capital* and *capitol,* between *consul* and *counsel.* Everything and everybody stand in the way of letter-writing today. Stenographers, dictaphones, picture postcards with no space for a message, telephones, stereotyped communications of ten or fifty words alluringly adapted by accommodating Telegraph Companies to every conceivable necessity of any properly standardized community; Law Courts which clamp lifelong alimony obligations upon you for frankly stating in black and white to the other woman that you admire her charms; florists who assure you that twenty thousand of their breed from Labrador to Afghanistan can "say it with flowers" for you, if you will only whisper it to them with greenbacks—all, all these demoralizing, cramping, or robotizing agencies have made most modern Americans unable to write a single letter worth comparing with those of their uncouth ancestors. In fact, the solid-gold fountain pens hardly write one letter a month; they only sign checks! These two heroes of the Wilderness, with some feeble amanuensis aid perhaps, but mainly ex-

pressing in gentlemen's terms what their gentlemanly natures dictated, could give a point or two to many modern litterateurs.

Passing from the generic to the specific, these two letters appear to me strikingly illustrative of the personalities of their writers. Clark's letter is not only flowery (the formal letter of a Southern gentleman of that day, and not only of that day, was likely to be flowery); it is also the communication of a great admirer of Mars and of Bacchus! Note the stress he lays on a graphic description of warfare, all the more uncalled-for in that Vigo had no share in Clark's actual military operations; and note the increasingly sentimental climax, and the writer's inability to follow the logical thread so neatly laid down at the start. That is the great trouble with utterances made by men under the influence of liquor; they have plenty of brilliancy, but they are loosely tied together. Let the reader kindly allow an old pedagogue to proceed to the literary vivisection of that letter. It consists of two parts: in the first there is a discussion of the whys and wherefores of the affection and esteem which bind the writer to Vigo; the second gives way to an exuberance of sentiment. His "affection and esteem": good; Clark begins by

assuring his correspondent that he, Vigo, won them both; then he proceeds: "An affection . . ." and so on. We are entitled to expect after that "An esteem . . ." and so on, for the sake of balance. But no, the writer becomes so excited with the vivid description of his advance on Vincennes (what a bore he must have been to his family and friends in his late years!), that the poor "esteem" got entirely overlooked. Yet the two re-appear again later, in perfect military formation marshalling out the subject, in the guise of "the one—the other". Like many a tipsy orator, he thinks he is terribly logical, whereas he is only brilliant.

In the second part, Clark waxes sentimental, gushingly so; it is the "Mother Machree" stage, after the fifth drink. Here is to the good old days—"for Auld Lang Syne" (*"ah, better times,* etc."); tangible realities cannot keep up with the welling force of affection—"Drink to me only with thine eyes and I'll not ask for wine" (*"I am at a loss for words to express* etc."); my sweetheart, my sweetheart, where is my sweetheart—"Kathleen Mavourneen", "The Girl I Left Behind Me", and a few million others (*"Providence cut asunder life's tenderest string"*). It is the eternal *"crescendo"* of

the cups, governed by laws which are invariable because dictated by man's physical frame, and must have been the same from Noah's ignoble experiment to the days of the wine bricks of Mabel Willebrandt. Mind you, I do not now deny the *historical* importance of that last sentence, to which I gave so much weight earlier in the book; far from it. *In vino veritas!* I question the good taste of Clark's grand finale in a communication which even at the time must have appeared far from casual and inconsequential.

Vigo's letter seems to me a gem of patriotism, simplicity, and tact. Addressing himself to nobody less than "the saviour of this once distressed Country" and speaking as "a man whom Clark honored once with his friendship", he sympathizes with Clark's well-known attitude that America did not sufficiently honor her heroes, but deftly reminds the warrior who had since offered his services to several foreign countries, that the Country by which Vigo had been merely "adopted" must stay paramount in the hearts of her citizens, native and naturalized. How Clark must have regretted, when he read this message of a "foreigner", his highly indiscreet letter to Don Diego Gardoqui, the Minister from Spain: "No property or person

is safe under a government so weak and infirm as that of the United States, and as a result I have been induced to put into practice what I have for so long a time contemplated, of offering myself to the King of Spain . . ." Never mind: *"America and Kentucky* owe you very much", suggests Vigo with a delicious *diminuendo,* "but now your own tiny village of Locust Grove is shouting 'hooray' to you on no less a day than the Fourth of July, when people would be shouting 'hooray' to somebody or something in any case, it being a grand old holiday; the account is squared, as patriots' accounts go; what more do you want? Look at me!"

* * *

Like the ruefully sad *Leitmotif* which runs its mourning thread through the fabric of the most lighthearted Gypsy tunes, the Vigo claims in Washington dragged on, while Vigo, a widower by this time, was disposing of his home and servants and was about to start on the heartbreaking road of "long visits at the homes of his relatives". Could he not go to Washington, call on some of those who had seen him in Vincennes in the heyday of his glory, and move

them to pity? No, he shook his head, he would not. *Transeat a me calix iste. . . .*

Official Washington was probing into the matter; probing just a little deeper, as behooves patriotic dispensers of funds entrusted to them by the American People. One has to be careful with those foreigners! They are a wily, unreliable lot. True, President Harrison had given that claim a radiantly glowing endorsement, General Clark had supplied full details to prove how every penny of that loan went. Secretary Knox re-inforced the plea by his description of Vigo as "a man of the most scrupulous regard for truth, disinterestedness, and honor". And had the claimant been loyal to the United States? Well, rather! When the Valley was full of enemies and distant Posts were to be provided with American Flags, the only person entrusted with that most delicate and dangerous of tasks had been Vigo. The Committee on Claims thanked, declared itself well pleased with Vigo, stated formally that it "entertained implicit confidence in every statement made by the Colonel". Its report had been most favorable; the Government paid nothing.

Vigo went to board at the home of Betsy Laplante, a humble Canadian woman to whose

needs he had pledged himself to minister as a conscientious godfather many years before, to the pride and relief of the child's struggling family. It is said that one day, in a fit of anger, he tore into shreds one of the Clark notes which was still in his possession. This may be just a local legend. But it is actual history that when that greatest Americanizer of the Midwest passed away, his worldly possessions, exclusive of his credit upon the Government, amounted to $77.62.

CHAPTER X

Sunset on the Old Wabash

> "Another interesting character lives here, but forgotten, neglected, and in great poverty. I mean Colonel Vigo, who rendered important services to the Americans. They, indeed, gave him the rank of Colonel, but now suffer him to starve!"

THUS did Maximilian, Prince of Wied, describe our hero, then almost nonagenarian, when he visited Vincennes in 1834. Cheer up, oh witty Prince, half a century later relief will come; if not to Vigo, at least to the second generation of his "in-laws". . . . And the heirs of Andrew Gardner, the undertaker, will then be paid the twenty dollars of the bill which he presented to the city for all the expenses of Vigo's dismal funeral. Two more years, oh observant Prince, and the shrunken old man will pass away, a pitiful-looking boarder in the humble house of Madame Laplante, repeating the words which had become his *refrain* in the long evening of his days: "Everybody has forgotten me—everybody."

Let Vigo's heirs (Americans all, for it was destined that everyone of his benefactions should accrue to his adopted Land), who finally received the money due him, signing a receipt in full against a cash payment of $49,898.60, continue to ignore the testimony of disinterested contemporaries and to assure us that Vigo was properly fed and sufficiently clothed in his old age: we are not discussing calories, nor the relative percentages of merino wool and Savannah cotton in underwear. The point at stake is bigger: it deals with the ingratitude not of a family—which after all was neither rich nor technically responsible—but of a Nation, which was both rich and responsible: responsible morally, legally, and from every other standpoint of justice and of policy. Never mind Vigo's "in-laws"; did THE UNITED STATES "feed" Vigo, did they "warm" him, according to the ways by which grateful governments reward their Makers? Where is his statue in the various Halls of Fame, his name in the sundry Honor Rolls of the Nation? Where is even the most terse of biographical accounts of so adamantine a Patriot in those history textbooks, through which the children of the United States first learn to know and venerate the

Builders of their dear Land? When was the Country which gave him birth ever thanked for such a gift, or his Italian fiesh-and-blood congratulated therefor? I hear that it is doubtful whether Vigo will be granted even a little "shrine" in the extensive Memorial now being erected to Clark at Vincennes; I know he did not appear on the postage stamps illustrating the Vincennes victory, nor in the Presidential message commemorating it. In Chicago it was my good fortune to rescue him, almost by accident, from the Washington Bicentennial float of the Spanish Jews! Who can blame the man-in-the-street for thinking that we Italians are just a liability for America, when we are robbed of all our heroes, from Columbus down, being only credited with the American-born gangsters who happened to spring from self-respecting Italian ancestry given an inferiority complex in the New World?

From his quiet corner of the Vincennes burial ground, Vigo can yet remedy that situation. The great Patriot has still a bountiful gift to offer to America: that of four million of his countrymen living in the United States. I beg my readers, and especially those of Italian blood or descent, to be patient and to listen dis-

passionately until I have fully explained my thought. We are treading dangerous ground, I know, but my heart is full of love and understanding toward my own flesh-and-blood and toward the Land of our common destiny.

The Italian in America has done his level best to Americanize himself during the last few years. Insofar as his *conscious* actions go, he is thoroughly an American. Yet he knows, and other Americans know only too well, that he is still in a class by himself. He cannot quite shed his inheritance! And the next move is up to his new Country, which finds it frightfully hard to step forward a few inches to meet him. How can she do it graciously, and in fairness to *her own* inheritance? For the American, despite all his faults, is the fairest fellow on God's own earth.

Let us begin by denying vehemently the truth of the often repeated statement that "the Italian problem has been solved". Politically, it has; culturally, not at all. The Italian in this Country may aptly be called an American mistletoe. That is, he bears the same relation to the rest of the American community that the mistletoe bears to the tree to which it is inextricably attached: the death of the tree would bring death

to the mistletoe also; but the life of the mistletoe, although in no way injurious to its supporter, develops along entirely independent lines. Neither one is "to blame". Neither one is "better" than the other. Fault-finding will lead us nowhere.

What causes this situation, not to be found in other Lands whither Italians direct their steps? It is not true that Americans in general do not respect and even love the Italians among them: most American men have a real affection for some Italian in their acquaintance or employ, and most American women feel a more spontaneous sense of attraction for an Italian than for a man of almost any other race. But of the great civilization from which the Italians sprang, the average American knows, alas, practically nothing; let us not forget that his training has been wholly technical, and that his public school atlas contained fifty maps, of which forty covering America, ten the rest of the world—most of those ten being commercial or industrial maps, showing the possibilities of *American* imports and exports. If this man-in-the-street is told that "without Italy, world culture would be beheaded" (Nicholas Murray Butler), he shrugs his shoulders, since "world

culture" conveys no practical picture to his mind. If he is told that all the great Encyclopedias, of any country, in any language, from the Britannica down, immortalize more Italians than persons of any other nationality, he is genuinely glad to hear it, as a fair-minded man; but, as a firm believer in the democratic theory that majorities must be right, he secretly tries to reconcile that statement with the humble opinion of Italy and the Italians he had hitherto shared with almost all his friends, and concludes sadly, "One hundred million Americans can't be wrong".

And what are the implications of this conclusion from the standpoint of the four million Italians in the United States? Simply this: that the Italian-American, while today wearing American clothes, speaking the language of America, travelling on an American passport, owning his American store and home, and disproving the deep-rooted "bird of passage" theory by raising large broods of children who do not even know a word of Italian, retains a separate racial consciousness, a *defensive* consciousness, which is somehow communicated even to his totally American offspring, and fully explains to anybody conversant with criminal

psychology most of the tragedies of "second generation" gangdom and lawlessness—as I discussed at length in my *Italian Immigrant Backgrounds*. And if one of these American-born children should some day marry an Irish or a German girl—a rare occurrence, for races on the defensive seldom marry outside of their ranks—he will probably announce that he "married an American girl"; a strictly non-intentional misstatement, the result of a sub-conscious reaction. Thus the Italians in the A. E. F. behaved superbly in fighting for America, but when on leave they usually gathered wholly by themselves. The examples of this co-existence of a conscious Americanism and a sub-conscious aloofness from America could be multiplied at will. "The Americans do not understand us. . . ." Yet the man who says it would be utterly wretched if he had to live again in the Country from which he migrated thirty years before. Furthermore, he carries in his pocket citizenship papers which certify that he himself has been an American for twenty or more years!

The bitter Immigration Law of 1924 was supposed to remedy this situation, by giving America time to digest her less "assimilable" immigrants. As I repeatedly warned at the time,

it was bound to have the opposite effect. The campaign that carried it, was, in its last analysis, an "anti-Mediterranean" campaign. The Italians of America became alarmed. They organized culturally as they had never done in the past. They put their American citizenship papers in perfect order. They acquired a new pride of race—of *Italian* race. They insisted that *Italian* newspapers and magazines published in America must be written partly in English, and patronized those instead of the newspapers and magazines written by and for the general American public. And when the first national measure was passed which took no account of the millennial habits of a not inconsiderable part of America's population—the Eighteenth Amendment—they mobilized to circumvent it by every form of active and passive resistance. I am not defending their actions, I am stating a historical fact. And this is no criticism of Prohibition *per se;* it is a criticism of the mentality of those "earlier Americans" to whom Prohibition is due, who in all their discussions as to how the national habits of the Irish, Germans, Swedes, etc., would be affected, left, as usual, the Italians out of the picture, as a *quantité négligeable*. "These late arrivals will have to

take America as we make her for them: it is a case of 'take it or leave it'." The resistance which those reformers of Nordic drunkenness found among the Italians is a matter of common knowledge; it was an incognita which they had hardly stopped to investigate in their reckonings. It showed that henceforth the Italians in America can no longer be ignored with impunity.

Yet Mr. Hiram Johnson and Mr. Andrew Volstead are not the only ones who chose to ignore them. Employers of labor, political leaders do that all the time. In four-fifths of the Country, an Italian who wants to enter into pretty nearly any kind of business relations with non-Italians finds it almost unavoidable to distort or change his name: no chance of landing a job otherwise. Nobody will tell him why he was not chosen, although fully qualified in every other way: but the facts enable the poor fellow to surmise. And look at the pathetically inadequate representation of Italians in higher Government positions: in Washington, not one Senator, hardly any Representatives; in the capitals of the various States, a pitiful sprinkling among responsible posts; all this in the face of the fact that with the practical discontinu-

ance of immigration from Italy the American-born contingent of Italians in the United States began to outnumber the Italian-born, and that vast numbers of Italo-Americans are being graduated every year from State educational institutions, from Catholic Colleges, etc., thus creating a racial group educationally well equipped. Yet, try and sugest an Italian candidate for high office to "the boys" who run the politics of the Land! "Not a ghost of a chance, my dear fellow: the Americans will not vote for him because he is an Italian, and the Italians are too independent to give their ballot to him just because he is one of their race."

Now this statement, which I often heard from practical politicians, seems to me to contain considerable food for thought, and to supply a clue for a way out—for the only decent way out. If the Italians are so broad as not to cast a "racial" vote in favor of their own candidate, why should the other Americans be so narrow as to cast one in opposition to the Italian candidate, on racial grounds? *"Because he is not 'one of us'."* That terrible statement, seldom made openly except in Klan states, but common enough, ought to be inquisitively, yet sympathetically, investigated.

Why is he not "one of us"? First, because "the Italians did nothing to build up our Country"; second, because "they live a life of their own, separate from ours". I firmly believe that the career of Francis Vigo and the lavish dissemination of information as to his activities, hold invaluable possibilities for the removal of these two barriers, real or fanciful, which stand in the way of a reconciliation of America with an inseparable part of her own body politic.

The two problems are really one. If the Italian in the United States "lives a life of his own", it is mainly because he finds that when he has changed ninety-five per cent to meet Americans, Americans refuse to change the remaining five per cent to meet him. And they do not do it to be disagreeable, they are logical: "You came to a Country which is one hundred per cent made by us, you have to change one hundred per cent." But just because they are logical they must also admit that when it can be proven, facts in hand, that the Country was *not* one hundred per cent made by "them", they should not ask for a one hundred per cent cultural capitulation on the part of a Nation which helped them write earlier chapters of American history!

Naturally, we cannot find many Vigos in the

East, all the Atlantic Coast States but one (Maryland) being officially closed to Catholics during the earlier stages of their history; but the West proves fully my two contentions, first, that the Italians make superb pioneer stock when given a chance; second, that all other Americans around them welcomed and welcome their civilization with open arms, *because the products of that civilization worked shoulder to shoulder with them in the up-building of their new homeland.* In California, an Italian-American candidate to any high post, political or mercantile, is no more frowned upon than an Irish-American or a German-American; a Bank which for a quarter of a century called itself "Bank of Italy" was the largest banking institution of the Pacific Coast, *its non-Italian depositors far outnumbering the Italians;* the Mayor of San Francisco is an Italian (who has not even tried to anglicize his Christian name), although the Italian population of that city is barely fifty thousand—which proves that not only the Italian voters, but citizens of every other nationality must have cast their ballots for him. My aim in reporting all this is not the distributing of bouquets to Mr. Giannini the super-banker, or to His Honor Angelo Rossi;

if there be any bouquet-throwing, it is intended for Westerners of non-Italian stock, whose cheerful welcome to immigrants so different from them in *Kultur* has made California what she is today: a serene land of racial understanding, a heaven of all-American brotherhood. Even the Chinaman is a "brother" in San Francisco, and the Japanese was one until international politics intervened.

It is a well-known fact that the Easterner who has once drunk deep of that Western atmosphere of racial serenity can never again live happily in our suspicious East; and surely no California Italian can stand being "high-hatted" in New York or Chicago. Let Vigo work for the East the same miracle that has made the West even more sunny in disposition than it is in climate. Here also, under the ægis of earlier Patriots of their race, the Italians can be ushered into the cultural crucible of the Country as an intrinsic, formative part of America, free to develop their best selves as they are doing in Argentina, in Brazil, even in over-sensitive France—no longer on the defensive as interlopers, no longer torn asunder between heart's allegiance and "Citizen's papers". Thus one of the most delicate of racial problems in the

United States, one which too many interested parties are dangerously trying to minimize, will disappear from the already over-hyphenated life of the Land.

If this be "special pleading", let the reader remember that I am pleading at least as much for America as for the Italians thereof. Should he wish them to stay where they are now, suspicious and detached, he is welcome to it; but it will mean that his ill-advised pride is making him deaf to one of the most pressing of his civic duties. Peace also has her calls to arms, and he who does not heed them is also a slacker.

When viewed in this light, the bronze bell ("Old Vigo") which the great Patriot bequeathed to the most exalted public building of the political unit named after him, the Vigo County Court House—ordered purchased with the first five hundred dollars to be secured by his heirs under his will—acquires a lofty symbolic significance. What else did they mean, those pleading voices of bronze calling out from *Hôtels de Ville* all over the Old World, except the repeated reminder to the citizens at their feet that the State was warning them of their duties, military, social, or civic? Yet nobody at the time understood the meaning of Vigo's be-

quest. Some of his townsmen went so far as to endeavor to break his will on grounds of insanity, as proven by that unheard-of clause. Others, subconsciously affected, I suppose, by that very ancient and international legend which took American form through Longfellow's *Bell of Atri,* or by their own avaricious one-sidedness of outlook, tried to read in that clause of Vigo's testament the persistent voice of an unsatisfied creditor. Had they realized Vigo's ever-present *Italianità,* they would have visualized this Piedmontese sadly missing, on the occasion of national rejoicings or of calls to duty, the contrast and support of the two bronze voices of State and Church, of "Cæsar" and "Peter", of *Duomo* and *Palazzo Pubblico.* Show me one Italian in America who has forgotten that music, even if trained for years to public warnings uttered instead by the shrill whistle of a factory siren! Surely enough, the church was there, very conservative, very Italian in its Roman Catholicism: Vincennes Cathedral had, has, and will have for centuries to come a voice of bronze. But where was the lasting, the eternal voice of the political entity which Vigo had worked so hard to create—the Civic voice, as it were, to vie with the Religious in directing the activities

of the Citizen of the new Country he laboriously toiled to build? His own foreign voice, distorted by so many languages, deepened by so many ordeals, was good enough to counsel resignation, straightforwardness, patriotism, as long as he lived—but *after?* Death, a mere incident in the life of a great personality, should not be allowed to silence the call to duty which it had been the privilege of that leader to issue ever since he chanced across the bold political experiment called "The United States"; and Civic units of the New World have no money for anything as "useless" as a bronze bell. Hence "Old Vigo,"—in other words, Francis Vigo *sub specie aeternitatis* exhorting in one more language, universal and deathless, his beloved American fellow-countrymen to serve in a spirit of uncompromising devotion and of racial understanding the Republic which he presented with an empire.

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